

# INDIAN MYTH AND LEGEND

DONALD A. MACKENZIE



*With Illustrations in Colour  
by Warwick Goble  
and numerous monochrome  
Plates*

Folklore

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SITA FINDS RAMA AMONG LOTUS BLOOMS

*From the painting by Warwick Goble*



## PREFACE

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This volume deals with the myths and legends of India, which survive to us in the rich and abundant storehouse of Sanskrit literature, and with the rise and growth of Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism, &c. The reader is introduced to the various sacred works of the Hindus, including the ancient invocatory hymns of the four Vedas, the later speculative and expository "Forest Books" in which "the Absolute is grasped and proclaimed", and those great epic poems the *Rāmāyana*, which is three times longer than the *Iliad*, and the *Māhābharata*, which is four times longer than the *Rāmāyana*. In no other country have the national poets given fuller and finer expression to the beliefs and ideals and traditions of a people, or achieved as a result wider and more enduring fame. At the present day over two hundred million Hindus are familiar in varying degrees with the legendary themes and traditional beliefs which the ancient forest sages and poets of India invested with much beautiful symbolism, and used as mediums for speculative thought and profound spiritual teachings. The sacred books of India are to the Hindus what the Bible is to Christians. Those who read them, or hear them read, are believed to be assured of prosperity in this world and of salvation in the next. To students of history, of ethnology, and of comparative religion they present features of peculiar interest, for they contain an elaborate sociology of the



ancient Aryo-Indians, their political organizations, their codes of laws, their high ethical code, and above all their conceptions of God, the soul, and the Universe. Some knowledge of them is necessary for those who desire to approach with sympathy the investigation of the religious beliefs of our Hindu fellow men and to understand their outlook upon life and the world.

The Introduction deals with various aspects of the study of these ancient myths and legends which have been the inspiration of a national literature infused with much grandeur and sublimity. The historic Aryan controversy, of which the science of comparative mythology is a by-product, is passed under review, and it is shown to what extent philological theories regarding race problems have been modified during recent years as a result of the adoption of broader and more exact methods of ethnic and archæological research and the ever-extending study of comparative mythology. There has also been condensed much important data dealing with the early phases of Aryo-Indian civilization accumulated for historical purposes by industrious and painstaking Sanskrit scholars who have been engaged in investigating and systematizing the internal evidence of the various religious poems and treatises. It will be found that no general agreement has yet been reached regarding Aryo-Indian chronology, but it now appears to be well established that although there were early cultural as well as racial "drifts", fresh invasions, which had far-reaching results in the social and religious life of northern India, occurred at a late period in what is known as the Vedic Age. In consequence, the problem presented by this ancient civilization tends rather to grow more complex than to become simplified. Its origin is still wrapped in obscurity. At the very dawn of history Aryo-Indian culture had attained a compara-



tively high state of development, and a considerable period must be allowed for its growth. Even some of the ancient Vedic hymns, addressed by priests to the deities, are styled "new songs", which suggests the existence of an older collection. Many of them also afford indications that immemorial beliefs were in process of change and fusion. The sublime deities, Varuna and Mitra (Mithra), for instance, were already declining in splendour. Yet they must have been closely associated with Indra, king of the gods, in the unknown Aryan homeland, as is made evident by an inscription recently deciphered at Boghaz K  i, in Asia Minor, which refers to them as deities of the mysterious Mitanni people who were of Aryan speech like the settlers in the Punjab. There is no evidence, however, that the Mitanni rulers gave recognition to the fire god Agni, who in India was exalted as the twin brother of Indra. The problem involved may not be devoid of ethnic significance, although the identity of the Agni-worshipping section of the early raiders remains obscure.

During the early Vedic Age in India prominence was given to the gods: the social organization was of patriarchal character; the goddesses remained shadowy and vague, some being, indeed, little more than figures of speech. A great change took place, however, after the invasions of the Bharata and other tribes who are now referred to as "late comers". Profound and speculative thinkers attained to the pantheistic conception of the world soul; new doctrines, which are not referred to in the Vedic hymns, regarding the ages of the universe and transmigration of souls, received wide acceptance as the result of missionary efforts: the Vedic gods were reduced to the position of minor deities and new goddesses rose into prominence, one indeed being Bharati,



the tribal deity of the Bharatas, who became associated with the Saraswati river and under her new name was ultimately made the wife of the supreme god Brahma. It is significant to note that the new culture radiated from the "Middle Country", the area controlled by the "late comers". That it contained elements which were not of Indian origin is made clearly evident when we find that the doctrines of the ages of the universe and transmigration of souls were shared by other peoples, including the Greeks and Celts and a section of the ancient Egyptians. Sumero-Babylonian and Egyptian resemblances may also be traced in post-Vedic religious literature, the former, for instance, in the Deluge legend, and the latter in the myth regarding the avenging goddess Kali, who slaughters the enemies of the gods like Hathor-Sekhet, and has similarly to be restrained by one of the deities. The worship of goddesses was also prominent among the Sumerians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Celts, as contrasted with the worship of gods among broad-headed mountain and wandering peoples. In this connection special interest attaches to the conclusions of prominent ethnologists, who include in the Mediterranean or "Brown" race of brunet "long heads" the early Egyptians and Neolithic Europeans, the Sumerians and present-day "Aryan" types in India, and especially in the old "Middle Country" and Bengal. On the other hand, a broad-headed type is still prominent in the Punjab, the area occupied by the earliest invaders who worshipped the Vedic gods. Dr. Haddon suggests that these pioneers of civilization were mixed with peoples of Mongolian and other affinities. Some such ethnic explanation must be urged to account for the differences between Vedic and post-Vedic mythologies. The invasions of the "late comers", who entered India by a new



route, no doubt stimulated thought and promoted culture after settled conditions were secured, as was undoubtedly the result of the mingling of races elsewhere.

"It may be put down as an axiom", says Professor Jastrow, "that nowhere does a high form of culture arise without the commingling of diverse ethnic elements. Civilization, like the spark emitted by the striking of steel on flint, is everywhere the result of stimulus evoked by the friction of one ethnic group upon another": and he supports his theory with the evidence afforded by Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, Rome, France, Germany, and Great Britain, as well as the present-day United States of America, "the melting pot" of many peoples.

Throughout this volume comparative evidence is provided to assist the reader towards the study of this most interesting aspect of the Aryan problem. We trace the cremation custom, which has prevailed in India since Vedic times, to countries as wide apart as Great Britain, into which it was introduced during the Bronze Age, and Southern Siberia, where it is still practised by the Mongolian Buriats. Over the areas occupied by representatives of the Mediterranean race it was unknown prior to the invasions of unidentified fire-worshippers. Special interest also attaches to the horse sacrifice, which was also an Aryo-Indian ceremony even in Vedic times. It is not yet unknown among the Buriats. At one time the horse sacrifice was widely prevalent. White horses were sacrificed to the sun in Ancient Greece; the sun horses are referred to with horror by Ezekiel; the ceremony was also connected with the mysteries of Aricia grove. Indeed, as is pointed out in Chapter V, various ancient peoples offered up this domesticated and historic animal. In the Indian epics and religious treatises there are illuminating references to the horse sacrifice which



throw much light on the significance of the immemorial practice. White and black horses were alternately favoured, and it is evident that the practice was not only associated with solar worship, but was also intended to secure fertility—crops, and therefore rain in the first place, increase of flocks, herds, human offspring, &c.—as is undoubtedly the case among the modern-day Buriats. In India the horse was also offered up as a sin offering, a late conception, evidently. A prominent feature of this sacrifice in most countries was the decapitation of the sacrificial victim. Recent evidence from Egypt suggests that the sacrifice of the ass may have preceded the sacrifice of the horse. Professor Flinders Petrie has found in a triple tomb in the early dynastic Tarkhan cemetery the skeletons of three asses with the heads cut off and placed beside them. He suggests that the animals were killed to accompany their owner to the other world. The Buriats still sacrifice horses at graves, professedly for the same reason. As this custom was not prevalent throughout Ancient Egypt, it may have been an importation, connected, perhaps, with the myth about the sun-ass which gallops round a hill-surrounded world followed by the pursuing night serpent. An isolated reference is also made to the sacrifice of the ass in a Twelfth Dynasty story about a Naga-like demigod, a fact which emphasizes the historical importance of the material embedded in folk tales and mythologies. In this connection it may be noted that certain developed myths suggest there may have been either a cultural contact of Ancient Egypt with India, through an unidentified medium, or an infusion of religious ideas into both countries from a common source. In an Indian creation myth Prajapati weeps creative tears like the Egyptian sun-god Ra, whose rays are tears from which all things spring, as Maspero shows.



In India the juice of the soma plant was identified with the vital principle, and the demons were the poisoners of crops and plants; in Egypt honey-flowers and sacred trees sprang from the fertilizing tears of deities, while the tears of demons produced poisonous plants, diseases, &c. Like the Egyptian Horus, the Indian Prajápati, or Brahma, sprang from a lotus bloom floating on the primordial waters. The chaos-egg myth is also common to both mythological systems. Brahma issues from a golden egg like Ra, and a similar myth is connected with the Egyptian Ptah and Khnumu, and with the Chinese P'an Ku, while the egg figures in Eur-Asian folk tales which contain the germs of the various mythologies. All mythologies have animistic bases; they were, to begin with, systematized folk beliefs which were carried hither and thither in various stages of development by migrating and trading peoples. Each separate system bears undoubted traces of racial or local influences; each reflects the civilization in which it flourished, the habits of thought and habits of life of the people, and the religious, ethical, and political ideals of their rulers and teachers. When well-developed myths of similar character are found in widely separated districts, an ethnic or cultural contact is suggested. Such myths may be regarded as evidence of remote racial movements, which, although unsupported by record or tradition, are also indicated by ethnological data. It is hoped that the reader will find much suggestive material in this connection in their study of the myths and legends of India. They will also find that many of the tales retold in this volume have qualities which make universal appeal, and that some are among the most beautiful which survive from the civilizations of the ancient world.

Not a few, we are assured, will follow with interest



the development from primitive myths of great and ennobling ideas which have exercised a culturing influence in India through many long centuries, and are still potent factors in the domestic, social, and religious life of many millions of Hindus.

DONALD A. MACKENZIE.



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*To My Indian Friends*





# INTRODUCTION

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The triangular sub-continent of India is cut off from the rest of Asia by the vast barriers of the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush, the Suleiman mountains, and the Indian Ocean. Its population comprises about two hundred and ninety-five millions, and is of greatest density on the fertile northern plain, which is watered by three river systems, the Indus and its tributaries on the west, and the Ganges and Brahmaputra with their tributaries which pour into the Bay of Bengal. South of the Vindhya mountain ranges is the plateau of the Deccan. The climate varies from temperate on the Himalayan slopes to tropical in southern India, and over the entire country there are two pronounced annual seasons, the dry and the rainy.

Our interest abides in this volume chiefly with the northern plain and the people who are familiar in varying degrees with the sacred and heroic literature passed under review; that is, with the scenes of the early Indian civilization known as Aryan and those numerous inheritors of Aryan traditions, the Hindus, who exceed two hundred and seven millions of the population of India. Modern Hinduism embraces a number of cults which are connected with the early religious doctrines of the Aryanized or Brahmanized India of the past; it recognizes, among other things, the ancient caste system which includes distinct racial types varying from what is known as the



Aryan to the pre-Dravidian stocks. Other religious organizations may be referred to in passing. Buddhists are chiefly confined to Burma, Sikhs number two millions, the Mohammedans nearly sixty-three millions, while the Parsees number roughly ninety-five thousand; less than three million natives and half-castes are Christians.

Like Egypt, India is a land of ancient memories, but its history, or rather pre-history, does not begin until about a thousand years after the erection was completed of the great pyramids at Gizeh. Between 2000 B.C. and 1200 B.C. tribes of pastoral and patriarchal peoples of Aryan speech were pouring over the north-western frontier and settling in the Punjab. There are no written or inscribed records, or even native traditions, of this historic migration, but we are able to follow vaguely, from the references found in religious compositions, the gradual conquest of northern India, which covered a period of several centuries. To what extent this invasion was racial, rather than cultural, it is extremely difficult to discover. But no doubt can be entertained regarding the influence exercised by the ancient military aristocracy and their religious teachers. Certain of the Aryan gods still receive recognition in India after a lapse of over three thousand years. This fact makes Indian mythology of special interest to the ever-increasing number of students of comparative religion.

Indian mythology also possesses particular attractions for us on account of its intimate association with what is known as the "Aryan problem". Scholars of a past generation held pronounced views on Aryan matters, and produced a considerable literature of highly controversial character. In fact, theories regarding the Aryan languages and the Aryan "race" are as varied as they are numerous; the wordy warfare which occupied the greater



part of the nineteenth century, was waged ever strenuously and not infrequently with much brilliance; occasionally, however, it was not wanting in the undesirable elements of personal feeling and national antipathy. But, happily, we appear to have reached a time when this fascinating and important problem can be considered dispassionately in the proper scientific spirit, and without experiencing that unnecessary dread of having to abandon decided opinions which may have been formed when the accumulated data had less variety and bulk than that which is now available. This change has been brought about by the extended study of comparative religion and the wonderful and engaging results which have attended modern-day methods of ethnic and archæological research.

The Aryan controversy had its origin at the close of the eighteenth century, when that distinguished Oriental scholar Sir William Jones, who acted for a period as a judge of the Supreme Court in Bengal, drew attention to the remarkable resemblances between the Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, and Celtic languages. In 1808, Schlegel published his *Language and Wisdom of the Hindus*, and urged the theory that India was the home of an ancestral race and a group of languages that were progenitors of various European ones. Other scholars subsequently favoured Zend, the language of Persia, and transferred the "racial beehive" to that country; rival claims were afterwards set up for Asia Minor and the Iranian plateau.

The science of Comparative Philology was a direct product of these early controversies; it was established in the "thirties" when Bopp published his *Comparative Grammar* in which a new term, having a racial significance, was invented: he grouped all European languages, except Basque, Magyar, Turkish, and Finnish, as "Indo-Germanic". After the study of Sanskrit literature revealed, however,



that the Aryans occupied but a small part of India when their sacred hymns, the Vedas, were composed, the cradle of the Aryan race was shifted to some uncertain area beyond the Himalayan mountains.

Max Müller, the distinguished Sanskrit authority, who in the words of an Indian scholar "devoted his lifetime to the elucidation of the learning, literature, and religion of ancient India",<sup>1</sup> abandoned Bopp's patriotic term "Indo-Germanic" and adopted Aryan, which he founded on the Sanskrit racial designation "Arya". At first he accepted the theory of an Aryan race and especially of an Aryan civilization which originated on the Central Asian plateau, but, as will be seen, he subsequently modified his views in this regard.

A new theory regarding the Aryans, who are now more commonly referred to as Indo-Europeans, was strongly advocated in 1851 and later by Dr. Robert Gordon Latham, who devoted many years to the study of ethnology and philology. He argued that as the major part of the peoples speaking Indo-European tongues was found in Europe, the cradle of the race might, after all, be transferred westward. This theory was supported by the fact (among others) that the Lithuanian language was no less archaic than Sanskrit.

The European hypothesis found in time many able supporters, and the advocates of rival Teutonic and Celtic claims waxed eloquent and heated over the exact location of the Aryan homeland. An industrious search was meanwhile conducted for words common to all Aryan languages which described the natural features of the racial "cradle". This work of reconstruction was certainly not lacking in picturesque results, for attractive visions were presented of Aryan Arcadias in which the simple and contemplative

<sup>1</sup> Romesh C. Dutt's *Ramāyana* dedication.



ancestors of many bitter controversialists dwelt together in exemplary unity and peace. The question of location might remain unsettled, but it was generally agreed that the ancient people were surrounded by cows, sheep, and goats; sometimes they rode their horses or yoked them in rough rumbling carts, and sometimes they ate them. No asses were admitted to the fold because of their decided partiality for Central Asian plains, which seemed quite reasonable. Trouble was occasionally caused by wolves and bears, or, mayhap, a stray lion, but these and other worries associated with the simple life might be compensated for by the fact that the primitive people, as one writer<sup>1</sup> put it, "understood the art of drinking". Mead, brewed from honey, was found to be "dear to the hearts of the ancient Aryans"; had the Brahman ever forgotten his "madhu", the Welshman his "medhu", or the Lithuanian his "medus"? Problems arose regarding the ancients' knowledge of trees: it was found that "bhaga" was applied indifferently by the family groups to the beech and the oak, and more than one ingenious explanation was suggested to account for this apparent discrepancy. Then, suddenly, Professor Max Müller swept into the background the rival Aryan homeland pictures, pointing out the while that it is "almost impossible to discover any animal or any plant that is peculiar to the north of Europe and is not found sporadically in Asia also". Destructive criticism proceeded apace, until now nothing has been left to us of the ancestral Arcadia but "air, water, heat and cold". In his review of the widely accepted philological "evidence" regarding the Aryan homeland, Max Müller declared it to be so pliant that it was possible "to make out a more or less plausible case for any part of the world". The advanced group of philologists held, indeed, that no racial

<sup>1</sup> Rydberg's *Teutonic Mythology*.



centre could be located. Ultimately "Delbrück went so far," says Professor Ripley, "as to deny that any single parent language ever existed in fact".<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile ethnologists and archæologists were engaged accumulating important data. It was found that Europe had been invaded at the close of the Stone Age by a broad-headed (brachycephalic) people, who brought no culture and even retarded the growth of civilization in their areas of settlement. A new problem was thus presented: were the Aryans a brachycephalic (broad-headed) or a dolichocephalic (long-headed) people? Its solution was rendered all the more difficult when it was found that living representatives of both racial types were peoples of Aryan speech. The idea that skull shapes, which are associated with other distinct physical characteristics, were due to habits of life and the quality of food which had to be masticated, was in time advanced to discredit new methods of ethnic research, but it has since been thoroughly disproved. In many ancient graves are found skulls which do not differ from those of modern men and women, living under different conditions and eating different food.

Patriotic controversialists were not awanting again in dealing with the problem of varying skull shapes. French scientists, for instance, have identified the "broad heads", now generally known as the Alpine race, with the ubiquitous Celts, but as present-day Hindus are mainly "long heads", the Aryan racial connection here suggested remains obscure. A clue to the mystery was sought for in Asia Minor, but no satisfactory result could be obtained there to support philological theories, because the Armenians, who are "broad heads", and their enemies and neighbours the Kurds, who are "long heads", are

<sup>1</sup> *The Races of Europe*, W. Z. Ripley, p. 481.



both peoples of Aryan speech. A scornful scientist has dismissed as a "prehistoric romance", the theory that the fair Scandinavian "long heads" are identical with the brunet "long heads" of India. Both the Celtic (Alpine) and Indo-Germanic racial theories are as inconclusive as they are diametrically in opposition.

The science of philology, which, at its inception, "dazzled and silenced all", has been proved to be no safe guide in racial matters. We must avoid, as Professor Ripley says, "the error of confusing community of language with identity of race. Nationality may often follow linguistic boundaries, but race bears no necessary relation whatever to them."<sup>1</sup>

By way of illustration, it may be pointed out in this connection that English is spoken at the present day by, among others, the Hong Kong Chinamen, the American Red Indians and negroes, by the natives of Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, and the Scottish Highlands, besides the descendants of the ancient Britons, the Jutes, the Angles, the Saxons, the Norsemen, the Danes, and the Normans in England, but all these peoples cannot be classified in the racial sense simply as Englishmen. Similarly, the varied types of humanity who are Aryan in speech cannot all be regarded as representatives of the "Aryan race", that is, if we accept the theory of an "Aryan race", which Virchow, by the way, has characterized as "a pure fiction".

Max Müller, in his closing years, faced this aspect of the problem frankly and courageously. "Aryas", he wrote, "are those who speak Aryan languages, whatever their colour, whatever their blood. In calling them Aryas we predicate nothing of them except that the grammar of their language is Aryan. . . . I have declared again

<sup>1</sup> *The Races of Europe*, W. Z. Ripley, p. 17.



and again that if I say Aryas, I mean neither blood, nor bones, nor hair, nor skull; I mean simply those who speak an Aryan language. The same applies to Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Celts, and Slavs. When I speak of these I commit myself to no anatomical characteristics. The blue-eyed and fair-haired Scandinavians may have been conquerors or conquered, they may have adopted the language of their darker lords or their subjects, or vice versa. I assert nothing beyond their language when I call them Hindus, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Celts, and Slavs, and in that sense, and in that sense only, do I say that even the blackest Hindus represent an earlier stage of Aryan speech and thought than the fairest Scandinavians. . . . To me an ethnologist who speaks of an Aryan race, Aryan blood, Aryan eyes and hair, is as great a sinner as a linguist who speaks of a dolichocephalic dictionary or a brachycephalic grammar."<sup>1</sup>

Aryan, however, has been found to be a convenient term, and even ethnologists do not scorn its use, although it has been applied "in a confusing variety of signification by different philologists". One application of it is to the language group comprising Sanskrit, Persian, Afghan, &c. Some still prefer it to "Indo-European", which has found rivals in "Afro-European", among those who connect the Aryan languages with North Africa, and "Afro-Eurasian", which may be regarded as universal in its racial application, especially if we accept Darwin's theory that the Garden of Eden was located somewhere in Africa.<sup>2</sup> We may think of the Aryans as we do of the British when that term is used to include the peoples embraced by the British Empire.

<sup>1</sup> *Biographies of Words and the Home of the Aryas*, pp. 120 and 245.

<sup>2</sup> *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin, chap. vi, p. 155 (1889 ed.), and *The Ancient Egyptians*, G. Elliot Smith, pp. 63, 64 (1911).



In India the Aryans were from late Vedic times divided into four castes—Brahmans (priests), Kshatriyas (kings and warriors), Vaisyas (traders, &c.), and Sudras (aborigines). (vert.)

Caste (Varna) signifies "colour", but it is not certain whether the reference is to be given a physical or mythological application. The first three castes were Aryans, the fairest people; the fourth caste, that comprising the dark-skinned aborigines, was non-Aryan. "Arya", however, was not always used in the sense that we have been accustomed to apply "Aryo-Indian". In one of the sacred books of the ancient people it is stated: "The colour of the Brahmans was white; that of the Kshatriyas red; that of the Vaisyas yellow; and that of the Sudras black".<sup>1</sup> This colour reference connects "caste" with the doctrine of yugas, or ages of the universe (Chapter VI).

Risley, dealing with "the leading castes and tribes in Northern India, from the Bay of Bengal to the frontiers of Afghanistan", concludes from the data obtained from census returns, that we are able "to distinguish two extreme types of feature and physique, which may be provisionally described as Aryan and Dravidian. A third type, which in some respects may be looked upon as intermediate between these two, while in other, and perhaps the most important, points it can hardly be deemed Indian at all, is found along the northern and eastern borders of Bengal. The most prominent characters are a relatively short (brachycephalic) head, a broad face, a short, wide nose, very low in the bridge, and in extreme cases almost bridgeless; high and projecting cheekbones and eyelids, peculiarly formed so as to give the impression that the eyes are obliquely set in the head. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. 1, p. 140.



This type . . . may be conveniently described as Mongoloid. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

According to Risley, the Aryan type is dolichocephalic (long-headed), "with straight, finely-cut (lepto-rhine) nose, a long, symmetrical narrow face, a well-developed forehead, regular features, and a high facial angle". The stature is "fairly high", and the body is "well proportioned, and slender rather than massive". The complexion is "a very light transparent brown—'wheat coloured' is the common vernacular description—noticeably fairer than the mass of the population".

The Dravidian head, the same authority states, "usually inclines to be dolichocephalic", but "all other characters present a marked contrast to the Aryan. The nose is thick and broad, and the formula expressing its proportionate dimensions is higher than in any known race, except the Negro. The facial angle is comparatively low; the lips are thick; the face wide and fleshy; the features coarse and irregular." The stature is lower than that of the Aryan type: "the figure is squat and the limbs sturdy. The colour of the skin varies from very dark brown to a shade closely approaching black. . . . Between these extreme types", adds Risley, "we find a large number of intermediate groups."<sup>2</sup>

Of late years ethnologists have inclined to regard the lower types represented by hill and jungle tribes, the Veddas of Ceylon, &c., as pre-Dravidians. The brunet and long-headed Dravidians may have entered India long before the Aryans: they resemble closely the Brahui of Baluchistan and the Man-tse of China.

India is thus mainly long-headed (dolichocephalic). We have already seen, however, that in northern and eastern Bengal there are traces of an infusion of Mon-

<sup>1</sup> *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, H. H. Risley, vol. 1, xxxi.    <sup>2</sup> *ibid.* xxxii-xxxiii.



golian "broad heads"; another brachycephalic element is pronounced in western India, but it is not Mongolian; possibly we have here evidences of a settlement of Alpine stock. According to Risley, these western broad heads are the descendants of invading Scythians,<sup>1</sup> but this theory is not generally accepted.

The Eur-Asian Alpine race of broad heads are a mountain people distributed from Hindu Kush westward to Brittany. On the land bridge of Asia Minor they are represented by the Armenians. Their eastern prehistoric migrations is by some ethnologists believed to be marked by the Ainus of Japan. They are mostly a grey-eyed folk, with dark hair and abundant moustache and beard, as contrasted with the Mongols, whose facial hair is scanty. There are short and long varieties of Alpine stock, and its representatives are usually sturdy and muscular. In Europe these broad-headed invaders overlaid a long-headed brunet population, as the early graves show, but in the process of time the broad heads have again retreated mainly to their immemorial upland habitat. At the present day the Alpine race separates the long-headed fair northern race from what is known as the long-headed dark Mediterranean race of the south.

A slighter and long-headed brunet type is found south of Hindu Kush. Ripley has condensed a mass of evidence to show that it is akin to the Mediterranean race.<sup>2</sup> He refers to it as the "eastern branch", which includes Afghans and Hindus. "We are all familiar with the type," he says, "especially as it is emphasized by inbreeding and selection among the Brahmans. . . . There can be no doubt of their (the Eastern Mediterraneans) racial affinities with our Berbers, Greeks, Italians, and

<sup>1</sup> *The People of India*, H. H. Risley, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *The Races of Europe*, W. Z. Ripley, 450 *et seq.*



Spaniards. They are all members of the same race, at once the widest in its geographical extension, the most populous and the most primitive of our three European types."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Elliot Smith supports Professor Ripley in this connection, and includes the Arabs with the southern Persians in the same group, but finding the terms "Hamitic" and "Mediterranean" insufficient, prefers to call this widespread family the "Brown race", to distinguish its representatives from the fair Northerners, the "yellow" Mongolians, and the "black" negroes.

North of the Alpine racial area are found the nomadic Mongolians, who are also "broad heads", but with distinguishing facial characteristics which vary in localities. As we have seen, the Mongoloid features are traceable in India. Many settlers have migrated from Tibet, but among the high-caste Indians the Mongoloid eyes and high cheek bones occur in families, suggesting early crossment.

Another distinctive race has yet to be accounted for—the tall, fair, blue-eyed, long-headed Northerners, represented by the Scandinavians of the present day. Sergi and other ethnologists have classed this type as a variety of the Mediterranean race, which had its area of localization on the edge of the snow belt on lofty plateaus and in proximity to the Arctic circle. The theory that the distinctive blondness and great stature of the Northerners were acquired in isolation and perpetuated by artificial selection is, however, more suggestive than conclusive, unless we accept the theory that acquired characteristics can be inherited. How dark eyes became grey or blue, and dark hair red or sandy, is a problem yet to be solved.

The ancestors of this fair race are believed to have

<sup>1</sup> *The Races of Europe*, W. Z. Ripley, p. 451.



been originally distributed along the northern Eur-Asian plateaus; Keane's blonde long-headed Chudes<sup>1</sup> and the Wu-suns in Chinese Turkestan are classed as varieties of the ancient Northern stock. An interesting problem is presented in this connection by the fair types among the ancient Egyptians, the modern-day Berbers, and the blondes of the Atlas mountains in Morocco. Sergi is inclined to place the "cradle" of the Northerners on the edge of the Sahara.

The broad-headed Turki and Ugrians are usually referred to as a blend of the Alpine stock and the proto-Northerners, with, in places, Mongolian admixture.

As most of the early peoples were nomadic, or periodically nomadic, there must have been in localities a good deal of interracial and intertribal fusion, with the result that intermediate varieties were produced. It follows that the intellectual life of the mingling peoples would be strongly influenced by admixture as well as by contact with great civilizations.

It now remains for us to deal with the Aryan problem in India. Dr. Haddon considers that the invading Aryans were "perhaps associated with Turki tribes" when they settled in the Punjab.<sup>2</sup> Prior to this racial movement, the Kassites, whose origin is obscure, assisted by bands of Aryans, overthrew the Hammurabi dynasty in Babylon and established the Kassite dynasty between 2000 B.C. and 1700 B.C. At this period the domesticated horse was introduced, and its Babylonian name, "the ass of the East", is an indication whence it came. Another Aryan invasion farther west is marked by the establishment of the Mitanni kingdom between the area controlled by the Assyrians and the Hittites. Its kings had names

<sup>1</sup> *Man, Past and Present*, A. H. Keane, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> *The Wanderings of Peoples*, A. C. Haddon, p. 21.



which are clearly Aryan. These included Saushatar, Artatatama, Sutarna, and Tushratta. The latter was the correspondent in the Tel-el-Amarna letters of his kinsmen the Egyptian Pharaohs, Amenhotep the Magnificent, and the famous Akhenaton. The two royal houses had intermarried after the wars of Thothmes III. It is impossible to fix the date of the rise of the Mitanni power, which held sway for a period over Assyria, but we know that it existed in 1500 B.C. The horse was introduced into Egypt before 1580 B.C.

It is generally believed that the Aryans were the tamers of the horse which revolutionized warfare in ancient days, and caused great empires to be overthrown and new empires to be formed. When the Aryans entered India they had chariots and swift steeds.

There is no general agreement as to the date of settlement in the Punjab. Some authorities favour 2000 B.C., others 1700 B.C.; Professor Macdonell still adheres to 1200 B.C.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the infusion was at first a gradual one, and that it was propelled by successive folk-waves. The period from the earliest migrations until about 800 or 700 B.C. is usually referred to as the Vedic Age, during which the Vedas, or more particularly the invocatory hymns to the deities, were composed and compiled. At the close of this Age the area of Aryan control had extended eastward as far as the upper reaches of the Jumna and Ganges rivers. A number of tribal states or communities are referred to in the hymns.

It is of importance to note that the social and religious organization of the Vedic Aryans was based upon the principle of "father right", as contrasted with the principle of "mother right", recognized by representative communities of the Brown race.

<sup>1</sup> *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects* (1912), p. viii.



Like the Alpine and Mongoloid peoples, the Vedic Aryans were a patriarchal people, mainly pastoral but with some knowledge of agriculture. They worshipped gods chiefly: their goddesses were vague and shadowy: their earth goddess Prithivi was not a Great Mother in the Egyptian and early European sense; her husband was the sky-god Dyaus.

In Egypt the sky was symbolized as the goddess Nut, and the earth as the god Seb, but the Libyans had an earth-goddess Neith. The "Queen of Heaven" was a Babylonian and Assyrian deity. If the Brown race predominated in the Aryan blend during the Vedic Age, we should have found the Great Mother more in prominence.

The principal Aryan deities were Indra, god of thunder, and Agni, god of fire, to whom the greater number of hymns were addressed. From the earliest times, however, Aryan religion was of complex character. We can trace at least two sources of cultural influence from the earlier Iranian period.<sup>1</sup> The hymns bear evidence of the declining splendour of the sublime deities Varuna and Mitra (Mithra). It is possible that the conflicts to which references are made in some of the hymns were not unconnected with racial or tribal religious rivalries.

Indra, as we show (Chapter I), bears resemblances to other "hammer gods". He is the Indian Thor, the angry giant-killer, the god of war and conquests. That his name even did not originate in India is made evident by an inscription at Boghaz Koi, in Asia Minor, referring to a peace treaty between the kings of the Hittites and Mitanni. Professor Hugo Winckler has deciphered from this important survival of antiquity "In-da-ra" as a Mi-

<sup>1</sup> A convenient term to refer to the unknown area occupied by the Vedic Aryans before they invaded India.



tanni deity who was associated with Varuna, Mitra, and Nasatya.

No evidence has yet been forthcoming to indicate any connection between the Aryans in Mitanni and the early settlers in India. It would appear, however, that the two migrations represented by the widely separated areas of Aryan control, radiated from a centre where the gods Indra, Varuna, and Mitra were grouped in the official religion. The folk-wave which pressed towards the Punjab gave recognition to Agni, possibly as a result of contact, or, more probably, fusion with a tribe of specialized fire-worshippers.

If we separate the Indra from the Agni, cremating worshippers, it will be of interest to follow the ethnic clue which is thus suggested. Modern-day Hindus burn their dead in accordance with the religious practice of the Agni worshippers in the Vedic Age. It is doubtful, however, if all the Aryan invaders practised cremation. There are references to burial in the "house of clay", and Yama, god of the dead, was adored as the first man who explored the path to the "Land of the Pitris" (Fathers) which lay across the mountains. Professor Oldenberg considers that these burials referred to the disposal of the bones and ashes of the dead.

Professor Macdonell and Dr. Keith, however, do not share Professor Oldenberg's view in this connection.<sup>1</sup> They hold that the epithet *Agni-dagdhab*, "burnt with fire", "applies to the dead who were burned on the funeral pyre"; the other custom being burial—*An-agni-dagdhab*, "not burnt with fire". They also refer to *Paroptah*, "casting out", and *Uddhitah*, "Exposure of the dead", which are expressions of doubtful meaning

<sup>1</sup> *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, A. A. Macdonell and A. B. Keith, Vol. I, pp. 8, 9 (1912).



These authorities add: "Burial was clearly not rare in the Rigvedic period: a whole hymn (x, 18) describes the ritual attending it. The dead man was buried apparently in full attire, with his bow in his hand, and probably at one time his wife was immolated to accompany him. . . . But in the Vedic period both customs appear in a modified form: the son takes the bow from the hand of the dead man, and the widow is led away from her dead husband by his brother or nearest kinsman. A stone is set up between the dead and the living to separate them."

The Persian fire-worshippers, on the other hand, did not cremate their dead, but exposed them on "towers of silence" to be devoured by vultures, like their modern-day representatives the Parsees, who migrated into India after displacement by the Mohammedans. In Persia the sacred fire was called Atar,<sup>1</sup> and was identified with the supreme deity Ahura-Mazda (Ormuzd).

Agni of the Vedic Age is the messenger between gods and men; he conducts the deities to the sacrifice and the souls of the cremated dead to Paradise; he is also the twin brother of Indra.

Now, it is of interest to note, in considering the racial significance of burial rites, that cremation was not practised by the western representatives of the Brown race. In pre-Dynastic Egypt the dead were interred as in Babylon,<sup>2</sup> with food vessels, &c. Neolithic man in Europe also favoured crouched burials, and this practice obtained all through the Bronze Age.

The Buriats, who are Mongols dwelling in the vicinity of Lake Baikal, still perpetuate ancient customs, which

<sup>1</sup> Compared with the Latin *atrium*, "the room that contained the hearthfire". Agni is cognate with the Latin *ignis*, cf. Lithuanian, *ugnis szwenta*, "holy fire"—*Early Religious Poetry of Persia*, Professor Moulton, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>2</sup> The theory that certain Babylonian graves show traces of cremation has been abandoned.—*A History of Sumer and Akkad*, L. W. King, pp. 20, 21 (1910).



resemble those of the Vedic Aryans, for they not only practise cremation but also sacrifice the horse (see Chap. V). In his important study of this remarkable people, Mr. Curtin says:<sup>1</sup> "The Buriats usually burn their dead; occasionally, however, there is what is called a 'Russian burial', that is, the body is placed in a coffin and the coffin is put in the ground. But generally if a man dies in the Autumn or the Winter his body is placed on a sled and drawn by the horse which he valued most to some secluded place in the forest. There a sort of house is built of fallen trees and boughs, the body is placed inside the house, and the building is then surrounded with two or three walls of logs so that no wolf or other animal can get into it." The horse is afterwards slain. "If other persons die during the winter their bodies are carried to the same house. In this lonely silent place in the forest they rest through the days and nights until the first cuckoo calls, about the ninth of May. Then relatives and friends assemble, and without opening the house burn it to the ground. Persons who die afterwards and during the Summer months are carried to the forest, placed on a funeral pile, and burned immediately. The horse is killed just as in the first instance."

When the dead are buried without being burned, the corpse is either carried on a wagon, or it is placed upright in front of a living man on horseback so as to ride to its last resting place. The saddle is broken up and laid at the bottom of the grave, while the body is turned to face the south-east. In this case they also sacrifice the horse which is believed to have "gone to his master, ready for use".

Cremation spread throughout Europe, as we have said,

<sup>1</sup> *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, Jeremiah Curtin, p. 101.



in the Bronze Age. It was not practised by the early folk-waves of the Alpine race which, according to Mosso,<sup>1</sup> began to arrive after copper came into use. The two European Bronze Age burial customs, associated with urns of the "food vessel" and "drinking cup" types, have no connection with the practice of burning the dead. The Archæological Ages have not necessarily an ethnic significance. Ripley is of opinion, however, that the practice of cremation indicates a definite racial infusion, but unfortunately it has destroyed the very evidence, of which we are most in need, to solve the problem. It is impossible to say whether the cremated dead were "broad heads" or "long heads".

"Dr. Sophus Müller of Copenhagen is of opinion that cremation was not practised long before the year 1000 B.C. though it appeared earlier in the south of Europe than in the north. On both points Professor Ridgeway of Cambridge agrees with him."<sup>2</sup>

The migration of the cremating people through Europe was westward and southward and northward; they even swept through the British Isles as far north as Orkney. They are usually referred to by archæologists as "Aryans"; some identify them with the mysterious Celts, whom the French, however, prefer to associate, as we have said, with the Alpine "broad heads" especially as this type bulks among the Bretons and the hillmen of France. We must be careful, however, to distinguish between the Aryans and Celts of the philologists and archæologists.

It may be that these invaders were not a race in the proper sense, but a military confederacy which maintained a religious organization formulated in some unknown area where they existed for a time as a nation. The Normans

<sup>1</sup> *The Dawn of Mediterranean Civilization*, A. Mosso, London Trans., 1910.

<sup>2</sup> *British Museum Guide to the Antiquities of the Bronze Age*, pp. 23, 24.



who invaded these islands were Scandinavians<sup>1</sup>; they settled in France, intermarried with the French, and found allies among the Breton chiefs. It is possible that the cremating people similarly formed military aristocracies when they settled in Hindustan, Mitanni, and in certain other European areas. "Nothing is commoner in the history of migratory peoples," says Professor Myres,<sup>2</sup> "than to find a very small leaven of energetic intruders ruling and organizing large native populations, without either learning their subjects' language or imposing their own till considerably later, if at all." The archæological evidence in this connection is of particular value. At a famous site near Salzburg, in upper Austria, over a thousand Bronze Age graves were discovered, just over half of which contained unburnt burials. Both methods of interment were contemporary in this district, "but it was noticed that the cremated burials were those of the wealthier class, or of the dominant race."<sup>3</sup> We find also that at Hallstatt "the bodies of the wealthier class were reduced to ashes".<sup>4</sup> In some districts the older people may have maintained their supremacy. At Watsch and St. Margaret in Carniola "a similar blending of the two rites was observed . . . the unburnt burials being the richer and more numerous".<sup>5</sup> The descent of the Achaens into Greece occurred at a date earlier than the rise of the great Hallstatt civilization. According to Homeric evidence they burned their dead; "though the body of Patroklos was cremated," however, "the lords of Mycenae were interred unburnt in richly furnished graves".<sup>6</sup> In Britain the cremating people mingled with their predecessors perhaps more intimately

<sup>1</sup> Associated, some authorities urge, with Germans from the mouth of the Elbe.

<sup>2</sup> *The Dawn of History*, J. L. Myres, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> *British Museum Guide to the Antiquities of the Bronze Age*, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> *British Museum Guide to the Antiquities of the Early Iron Age*, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p. 8.



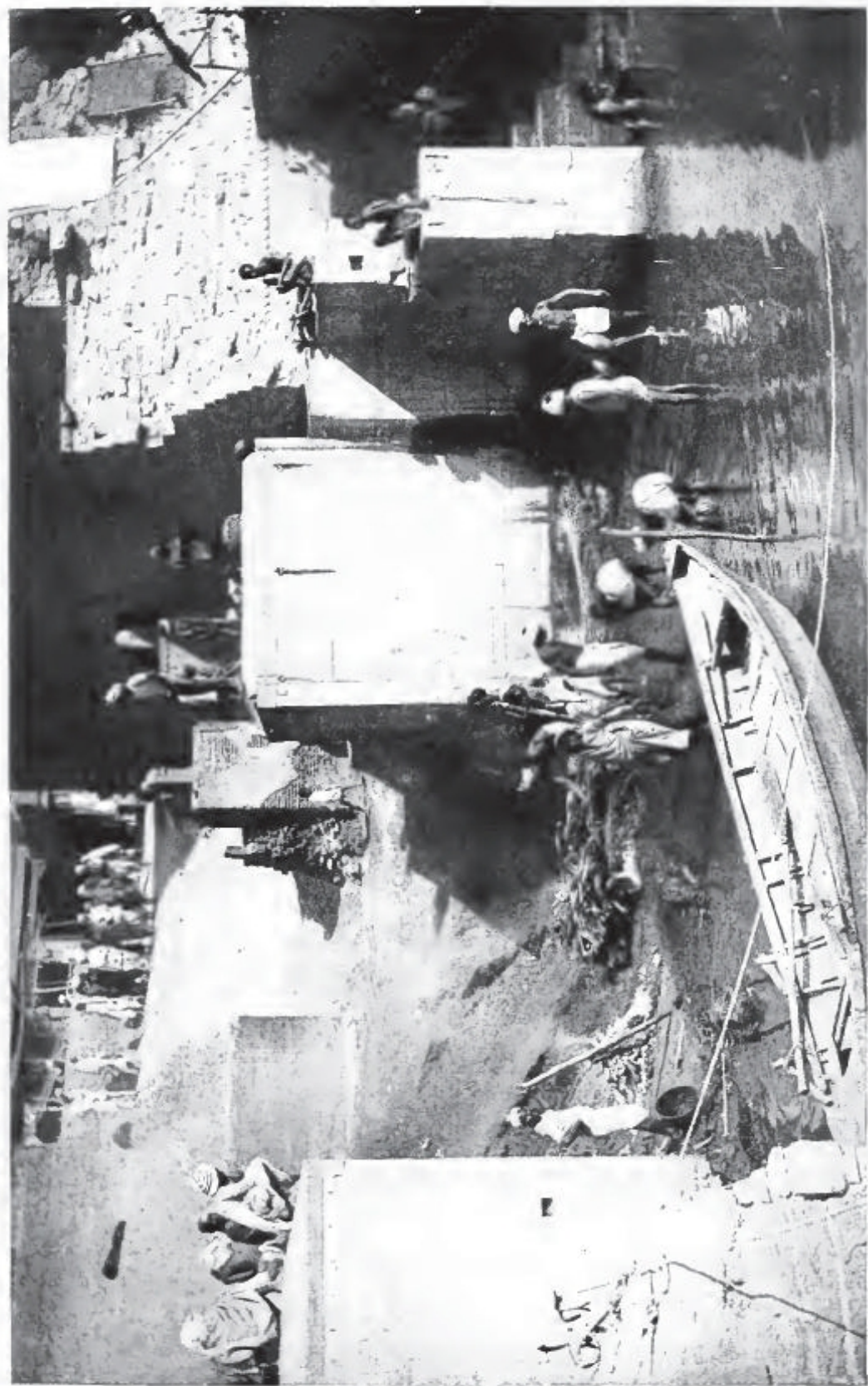


Photo. Johnson and Hoffmann

THE CREMATION GHAT, BENARES





than in other areas where there were large states to conquer. A characteristic find on Acklam Wold, Yorkshire, may be referred to. In this grave "a pile of burnt bones was in close contact with the legs of a skeleton buried in the usual contracted position, and they seemed to have been deposited while yet hot, for the knees of the skeleton were completely charred. It has been suggested in cases like this, or where an unburnt body is surrounded by a ring of urn burials, the entire skeleton may be those of chiefs or heads of families, and the burnt bones those of slaves, or even wives, sacrificed at the funeral. The practice of suttee (sati) in Europe rests indeed on the authority of Julius Cæsar, who represents such religious suicides as having, at no remote period from his own, formed a part of the funeral rites of the Gaulish chiefs; and also states that the relatives of a deceased chieftain accused his wives of being accessory to his death, and often tortured them to death on that account."<sup>1</sup> If this is the explanation, the cremating invaders constituted the lower classes in Gaul and Britain, which is doubtful. The practice of burning erring wives, however, apparently prevailed among the Mediterranean peoples. In an Egyptian folk-tale a Pharaoh ordered a faithless wife of a scribe to be burned at the stake.<sup>2</sup> One of the Ossianic folk tales of Scotland relates that Grainne, wife of Finn-mac-Coul, who eloped with Diarmid, was similarly dealt with.<sup>3</sup> The bulk of the archæological evidence seems to point to the invaders, who are usually referred to as "Aryans" having introduced the cremation ceremony into Europe. Whence came they? The problem is greatly complicated by the evidence from Palestine, where cremation was practised by the hewers of the great artificial caves which were constructed about

<sup>1</sup> British Museum *Guide to the Antiquities of the Bronze Age*, pp. 16, 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Egyptian Myth and Legend*, p. 143.    <sup>3</sup> Campbell's *West Highland Tales*, vol. iii, p. 55.



3000 B.C.<sup>1</sup> As cremation did not begin in Crete, however, until the end of period referred to as "Late Minoan Third" (1450-1200 B.C.)<sup>2</sup> it may be that the Palestinian burials are much later than the construction of the caves.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the cremation rite originated among a nomadic people. The spirits of the dead were got rid of by burning the body: they departed, like the spirit of Patroklos, after they had received their "meed of fire". Burial sites were previously regarded as sacred because they were haunted by the spirits of ancestors (the Indian *Pitris* = "fathers"). A people who burned their dead, and were therefore not bound by attachment to a tribal holy place haunted by spirits, were certainly free to wander. The spirits were transferred by fire to an organized Hades, which appears to have been conceived of by a people who had already attained to a certain social organization and were therefore capable of governing the communities which they subdued. When they mingled with peoples practising other rites and professing different religious beliefs, however, the process of racial fusion must have been accompanied by a fusion of beliefs. Ultimately the burial customs of the subject race might prevail. At any rate, this appears to have been the case in Britain, where, prior to the Roman Age, the early people achieved apparently an intellectual conquest of their conquerors; the practice of the cremation rite entirely vanished.

We have gone far afield to find a clue to assist towards the solution of the Aryan problem in India. The evidence accumulated is certainly suggestive, and shows that the conclusions of the early philologists have been narrow in the extreme. If the long-headed Kurds are, as Ripley

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Civilization in Palestine*, R. A. S. Macalister.

<sup>2</sup> *The Discoveries in Crete*, Professor R. M. Burrows, p. 100. Dating according to *Crete the Forerunner of Greece*, C. H. and H. B. Hawes, p. xiv.



believes, the descendants of the Mitanni raiders, then the Aryans of history must be included in the Brown race. As, however, cremation was not practised by the Berbers, the Babylonians, the early Cretans, or other representatives of the ancient brunet dolichocephalic peoples, it may be that the custom, which still lingers among the Mongolian Buriats, was not in the narrow sense of Aryan origin. It may have been first practised among an unknown tribe of fire-worshippers, who came under the influence of a great teacher like Zoroaster. We cannot overlook in this connection the possibility of an individual origin for a new and revolutionary system of religious doctrines. Buddhism, for instance, originated with Buddha.

As we have said, the Vedic religion of the Aryans in India was characterized by the worship of male deities, the goddesses being of secondary and even slight importance. A religious revolution, however, occurred during the second or Brahmanical Age—the age of priestly ascendancy. Fresh invasions had taken place and the Aryans were divided into tribal groups of Westerners and Easterners, on either side of a central power in Madhyadesa, the “Middle Country” which extended between the upper reaches of the Saraswati and the Ganges and the Jumna rivers. The Westerners included the peoples of the Punjab and the north-western frontier, and the Easterners the kingdoms of Kasi (Benares) and Maghadha as well as Kosala and Videha, which figure prominently in the *Ramáyana* epic, where the kings are referred to as being of the “Solar race”. The Middle Kingdom was the centre of Brahmanical culture and influence: it was controlled by those federated tribes, the Kuru Panchalas, with whom were fused the Bháratas of the “Lunar race”. It is believed that the military aristocracy of the “Middle Country” were late comers



who arrived by a new route and thrust themselves between the groups of early settlers.<sup>1</sup> The Bharatas worshipped a goddess Bharati who was associated with the Saraswati river on the banks of which the tribe had for a period been located. Saraswati became the wife of Brahma, the supreme god, and it would seem that she had a tribal significance.

If the Bharatas of the "Lunar race" worshipped the moon and rivers, it is possible that they belonged to the Brown race. The folk-religion of the tribe would be perpetuated by the people even although their priests became speculative thinkers like the unknown authors of the *Upanishads*. It is significant to note, therefore, that the goddesses ultimately came into as great prominence in India as in Egypt. This change took place during the obscure period prior to the revival of Brahmanism. In the sixth century before the Christian era Buddhism had origin, partly as a revolt of the Kshatriya (aristocratic) class against priestly ascendancy, and the new faith spread eastward where Brahmanic influence was least pronounced. When the influence of Buddhism declined, the Pantheon is found to have been revolutionized and rendered thoroughly Mediterranean in character. The Vedic gods had in the interval suffered eclipse; they were subject to the greater personal gods Brahma, with Vishnu and Shiva, each of whom had a goddess for wife. Brahma, as we have said, had associated with him the river deity Saraswati of the Bharatas; the earth goddess, Lakshmi, was the wife of Vishnu; she rose, however, from the Ocean of Milk. But the most distinctive and even most primitive goddesses were linked with Shiva, the Destroyer. The goddess Durga rivalled Indra as a deity of war. Kali, another form of Durga, was as vengeful and bloodthirsty

<sup>1</sup> *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*.





KALI

*From a bronze in the Calcutta Art Gallery*





as the Scottish Cailleach, or the Egyptian Hathor, who, as the earlier Sekhet, rejoiced in accomplishing the slaughter of the enemies of Ra.<sup>1</sup> Kali, as we shall see (Chapter VIII) replaced the Vedic king of the gods as a successful demon slayer. As the Egyptian Ra went forth to restrain Hathor, so did Shiva hasten to the battlefield, flooded by gore, to prevail upon his spouse Kali to spare the remnant of her enemies.

The rise of the goddesses may have been due in part to the influence of Dravidian folk-religion. This does not, however, vitiate the theory that moon, water, and earth worship was not unconnected with the ascendancy of the Brown race in India. The Dravidian brunet long heads were, as we have said, probably represented in the pre-Aryan, as well as the post-Vedic folk-waves, which mingled with pre-Dravidian stocks. Mr. Crooke inclines to the view that the Aryan conquest was more moral and intellectual than racial.<sup>2</sup> The decline of the patriarchal religion of the Vedic military aristocracy may thus be accounted for; the religious practices of the earlier people might ultimately have attained prominence in fusion with imported ideas. If the Aryan racial type was distinctive, as it appears to have been, in colour at any rate, the predominant people who flourished when the hymns were composed, may have greatly declined in numbers owing to the ravages of disease which in every new country eliminates the unfit in the process of time. Even if Aryan conquest was more racial in character than Mr. Crooke will allow, the physical phenomena of the present day can be accounted for in this way, due allowance being made, of course, for the crossment of types. In all countries which have sustained the shock of invasion, the tendency to revert to the aboriginal type is very marked.

<sup>1</sup> See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.

<sup>2</sup> *The North-Western Provinces of India*, 1897, p. 60.



At any rate, this is the case in Egypt and Crete as present-day evidence shows. In Great Britain, which was invaded by the broad heads of the Bronze Age, the long-headed type is once again in the majority; a not inconsiderable proportion of our people show Stone Age (Mediterranean) physical characteristics.

In this connection it is of interest to refer to immemorial beliefs and customs which survive in representative districts in Britain and India where what may be called pre-Aryan influences are most pronounced. A people may change their weapons and their language time and again, and yet retain ancient modes of thought. In Devon, which the philologists claim to be largely Celtic like Cornwall, the folk-lore shows marked affinities with that of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, suggesting the survival of ancient Mediterranean racial influence, for much of what we call Celtic links with what belongs to ancient Greece and the Egyptian Delta. Mr. Gomme has shown<sup>1</sup> in an interesting summary of recorded folk-practices that the "ram feast" of Devon resembles closely in essential details similar ceremonies in ancient Greece and modern India. At the beginning of May the people of Devon were wont to sacrifice a ram lamb to the deity of waters. The animal was tied to a pillar, its throat was cut, and young men scrambled to obtain pieces of its flesh for girls. The devourer was assured of good luck during the year. After the ceremony, dancing, wrestling, and drinking were indulged in. A comparison is drawn between this and similar rites among the ancient Semites and ancient Greeks. In India a Dravidian Paria acts as the temporary village priest. He uses a whip like the "gad whip" in Lincolnshire, and kills the lamb by tearing its throat with his teeth. A scramble takes place for the flesh, the people

<sup>1</sup> *Ethnology in Folklore*, George Laurence Gomme, p. 34 et seq.



circulate the village, as some communities in our own country still perpetuate the ceremony of "riding the marches" of ancient burghs; then universal licence prevails. Similarly law was suspended at the ancient Scottish Hallowe'en celebrations; in some districts even in our own day Hallowe'en and New Year practical jokes and rowdyism is still prevalent. Herodotus refers to the universal licence and debauchery which characterized the Isis festival in Egypt.

A remarkable feature of post-Vedic religion in ancient India is the prominence given to the doctrine of metempsychosis (transmigration of souls) and the conception of the yugas or ages of the universe.

In the *Rigveda* the soul of the dead proceeds at once, or at any rate after burial, towards the next world. In one passage only is it spoken of "as departing to the waters or the plants", and this reference, Professor Macdonell suggests,<sup>1</sup> "may contain the germs of the theory" of transmigration. In the speculative prose treatises, the *Upanishads*, which were composed in the Middle Country, the doctrine of metempsychosis is fully expounded. It does not follow, however, that it originated in India although it may have obtained there unrecognized by the priestly poets who composed the hymns to the deities, long before it became an essential tenet of orthodox or official religion. Other representative communities of the Brown race professed this doctrine which appears to have evolved from the vague belief shared by more than one primitive race, that the souls of the dead, and especially of dead children, were ever on the outlook for suitable mothers. Even in Central Australia a particular tribe has perpetuated "the germs of the theory", which may also be traced in the widespread custom of visiting standing

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 115.



stones at a certain phase of the moon to perform a ceremony so that offspring may be obtained. The Upanishadic doctrine of metempsychosis is less likely to have been so much coincidental as racial when we find that it is restricted to those areas where definite racial influences must have been at work. The Greeks believed in transmigration. So did also a section of the Egyptian people as Herodotus has stated and as is proved by references in folk-tales, temple chants and inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> As we show (Chapter VI), the Irish conception closely resembled the Indian, and it also obtained among the Gauls. There is no trace, however, that the Teutonic peoples were acquainted with the fully developed doctrine of metempsychosis; the souls of the dead departed immediately to Valhal, Hela, or the loathsome Nifelhel.

The doctrine of the world's ages is common to the Indian, Greek, and Irish mythologies, but is not found in Teutonic mythology either.<sup>2</sup> There are indications that it may have at one time obtained in Egypt, for there was an Age of Ra, then a deluge, an Age of Osiris, an Age of Set, &c.; but the doctrine, like other conceptions in Egypt, probably suffered from the process of priestly transformation in the interests of sectarian propaganda.

In India the ages are called the yugas, and this term has a totally different meaning in Vedic and Upanishadic times. Evidently the Bharata invasion and the establishment of the middle country power of their allies, the Kuru-Panchalas, was not unconnected with the introduction of the doctrines of metempsychosis and the yugas, and the prominence subsequently given to the worship of female deities.

<sup>1</sup> See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.

<sup>2</sup> The "Golden Age" of the gods, and the regeneration of the world after Ragnarok, do not refer to the doctrine of the world's ages as found in other mythologies.



If this theory can be established, we are confronted by an extremely interesting problem. It would appear that the mythology of the Vedic period bears a close resemblance to Teutonic, while that of the post-Vedic period connects more intimately with Greek, Celtic, and Egyptian. Assuming that the Vedic people were influenced by what we recognize as Teutonic modes of thought, do we find here proof that the Aryans came from Europe? In Chapter II it is shown that the Norse Heimdal displays points of resemblance to Agni. The former, however, has been developed almost beyond recognition as a fire god, and it is evident that we find him in northern Europe in his latest and most picturesque form. On the other hand, there is no dubiety about the origin of the Vedic Agni.

The evidence afforded by archæology is highly suggestive in this connection. Scandinavia received its culture from the south at a comparatively late period in the Bronze Age, and it certainly exercised no intellectual influence in Europe in earlier times. Bronze is, of course, of less ethnic significance than beliefs, but it is difficult to believe, at the same time, that an isolated and poorly armed people could have imposed its intellectual culture over a wide area without having received anything in return. It is more probable that the northern Germanic peoples were subjected to the same influences which are traceable in their mythology and in the Vedic hymns, from a common source, and there may be more than mere mythology in the persistent tradition that the ancestors of the Teutons immigrated from Asia led by Odin. We need not assume that the movement was so much a racial as a cultural one, which emanated from a particular area where religious conceptions were influenced by particular habits of life and "immemorial modes of



thought". Among the settled and agricultural peoples of the Brown race, the development of religious ideas followed different lines, and were similarly controlled by early ideas which sprang from different habits and experiences.

In the opening chapters we present various phases of Aryan life and religion in India, beginning with the worship of Indra, and concluding with the early stages of modern Hinduism. From the ancient tribal struggles of the Middle Country accumulated the hero songs which received epic treatment in the *Mahābhārata*, while the traditions of the "Easterners" were enshrined in the *Rāmāyana*. Although neither of these great works can be regarded as historical narratives, they contain a mass of historical matter which throws much light on the habits and customs and beliefs of the early peoples.

These epics were utilized by Brahmanical compilers for purposes of religious propaganda, and survive to us mainly as sacred books. In our pages we have given prominence to the heroic narrative which remains embedded in the mass of doctrinal treatises and mythological interpolations. The miraculous element is somewhat toned down in the accounts of conflicts, and the more dramatic phases of the heroic stories are presented in as full detail as space permits, so as to afford our readers glimpses of ancient life in northern India at a time when Vedic religion still held sway. This applies especially to the *Mahābhārata*, the kernel of which, no doubt, contains the hero songs of the Bharata and other tribes. The mythical conflicts of the *Rāmāyana* appeal less to western minds than its purely human episodes. We cannot help being impressed by the chivalrous character of the leading heroes, the high sense of honour displayed by the princes, and the obedience shown by sons to their parents. We may weary of Rama's conflicts with giants and demons,



but will long remember him as the child who pronounced his name as "Ama" and cried for the moon, or sat on his father's knee at meetings of the State Council. Our interest will also abide with him as a lover and a faithful husband who suffered wrong. His brothers are noble and heroic characters, worthy of Shakespeare. But even the Bard of Avon never depicted more wonderful and fascinating women than the heroines of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana*. Our gallery includes, among others, the noble and self-sacrificing Savitri, who rescued her husband from the clutches of death by exercise of her strong love and devotion; the faithful and virtuous Sita, and the sorrowful and constant Damayantī, and beautiful Shakuntalā. In western literature romance usually ends with marriage; in India the devotion of wives is of more account than the yearnings of love-smitten Juliets on moonlight nights.

Another aspect of Sanskrit literature is the feeling of the poets for Nature. These voluminous writers revelled in the luxuriant loveliness and splendour of Indian forests, and the charms of gleaming valleys and serene, snow-capped mountains; even the gods loved to hear the hum of insects and the songs of melodious birds, and, like mortals, to gather flowers of sweet scents and brilliant colours. Hundreds of songs were sung in praise of the lotus blooms that gemmed the clear waters of lakes and ponds, and Paradise was pictured as a jungle of beauty, fanned by soft winds, radiant with blossoms, and ever vocal with music and song. To illustrate this phase of India's classic literature, we reproduce at length the representative story of Nala with much of its poetic details.

The civilization revealed by the narrative poems was of no mean order. The ancient Aryans were chivalrous knights. No such barbaric incident occurs in the *Mahābhārata* battles as when in the *Iliad* the victorious



Achilles drags behind his chariot the body of the slain Hector. When Arjuna, the Indian Achilles, slays Karna, the Indian Hector, he honours his fallen foe and performs those rites at the funeral pyre which assures the dead hero immortal bliss in Paradise. When, again, Arjuna mortally wounds Bhishma, he procures water to quench the thirst of his dying opponent. Even the villains are not without their redeeming qualities. Duryodhana of the *Mahábhárata*, who consents to the slaughter of his sleeping rivals, dies with grief because the innocent children of his enemies were slain. Ravana, the demon king of Ceylon, touches us in the *Rámáyana* by his grief for his son, who was slain fighting against Laksmana, brother of Rama.

To appreciate fully the sacred and romantic literature of India, we should follow the advice of Robert Louis Stevenson. "To learn aright from any teacher," he wrote, "we must first of all, like a historical artist, think ourselves into sympathy with his position." And if in endeavouring to understand the religious conceptions of the ancient forest sages, we, at times, find ourselves in difficulties, it may be that "if a saying is hard to understand, it is because we are thinking of something else"—we are looking on India with European eyes and with European prejudices. "There is always", said Stevenson, "a ruling spirit behind the code of rules, an attitude, a relation, a point of the compass, in virtue of which we conform or dissent."<sup>1</sup>

We are confident that our readers who peruse with sympathy and, we hope, with enjoyment, the chapters which follow, will feel themselves drawn closer than hitherto to the millions of our fellow subjects in the great dependency of the British Empire, by whom Rama and Yudhishtira are regarded as ideal types of strong manhood, and Savitri and Sita as perfect women and exemplary lovers and wives.





A VYASA, OR PUBLIC READER, RECITING THE MAHABHARATA





# INDIAN MYTH AND LEGEND

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## CHAPTER I

### Indra, King of the Gods

Types of Hammer Gods—The Aryan Indra—Chinese World Shaper—Scottish Hunting Deity—Egyptian Artisan God—Greek and Roman Thunder Gods—Thor—Hittite, Assyrian, and other types—A Wail from Palestine—Babylonian Influence—Indra's Indian Character—A Nature Myth—Drought Demon slain—Gods and Demons in conflict—Origin of Indra's Thunderbolt—Demons' plot to destroy Universe—Babylonian Creation Myth—How Indra Shaped the World—Elfin Artisans in India, Egypt, and Germania—Babylonian Artisan God—Indra the Harvest God—The God of Battle—Comparison with Thor—Aryan Cattle Lifters—Indra's Queen and Attendants.

THE ancient Eur-Asian "hammer god", bearing the tribal name of Indra, accompanied the earliest invading bands of hunting and pastoral Aryans, who hailed with joy the "fresh woods and pastures new" of the Punjab, the green country of "Five Rivers". This deity of wanderers and invaders was already of great antiquity and wide distribution; his attributes were in accord with the habits and ideals of his worshippers; they multiplied with the discoveries of man and were ever influenced by the conditions prevailing in new areas of localization. He was the Thunderer who brought rain to quicken dried-up

pasture lands; he was the god of fertility, and he became the corn spirit; he was "the friend of man"; he was the artisan of the Universe which he shaped with his hammer, the dragon slayer, the giant killer, the slaughterer of enemies, the god of war. His racial significance must ever remain obscure. We cannot identify his original home, or even fix with certainty the archæological period in which he first took definite shape. It is possible that he may have been invoked and propitiated by Neolithic, or even by Palæolithic, flint knappers who struck fire from stone long ere they suspected the existence of metal; the primitive hunting and pastoral wanderers may have conceived of a thunder deity engaged in splintering the hills with his stone hammer, and fighting demons in the rude manner in which they themselves contended against beasts of prey. Memories of the Stone Age cling to the hammer god. Indra's bolt was "the all-dreaded thunder-stone" of Shakespeare's lyric; until recently Palæolithic and Neolithic artifacts were reputed to be "elf bolts" and "thunder bolts" which fell from the sky; in Scandinavian folklore "the flint hills" are the fragments of the weapon wielded by the thunder giant Hrungner. The bolt or hammer ultimately became an axe; and according to the modern Greeks, lightning flashes are caused by the blows of the "sky axe" (*astropeléki*); Scottish Gaelic retains an immemorial reference to the "thunder ball" (*peleir-tarnainaich*).

The hammer god's close association with hilly countries suggests that he was first worshipped on the steppes and then distributed by the nomads whose migrations were propelled by changing climatic conditions. He is found as far east as China, where, as P'an Ku, the dwarfish "first man", he smites primeval rocks with his thunder hammer while engaged in the work of shaping the hills;



he is found as far west as Scotland, where, as the hunting giant Finn-mac-Coul, "in height sixty feet", he strikes with his hammer, "Ord na Feinne", such mighty blows on his shield that he is heard by his followers in Lochlann (Scandinavia). From ancient Egypt come distant echoes of the world artisan Ptah, now a dwarf and anon a giant, who hammers out the copper sky, suggesting the presence in Memphis of early Asian settlers at the very dawn of history. In southern Europe the deity is Zeus-pater (Jupiter), the sublime wielder of the thunderbolt; in northern Europe he is lusty Thor, hurling Mjolner through the air against Jotuns, or cleaving valleys with it in the mountain range which he mistook for the giant Skrymer. We find the hammer god as Tarku among the Hittites; he is Indra in Mitanni as in the Punjab; he is Rammon, or Adad, who is carried aloft in triumph by the soldiers of Assur-banipal, the Assyrian Emperor; he is remembered in Palestine by the wail of Naaman, who cried: "When my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing . . ."<sup>1</sup> The thunder god is also known in Babylon, which received many of its settlers from the hills of Elam and where Kassites, associated with Aryans, established a dynasty after successful invasion, prior to the discovery of the Punjab. The authorities are agreed that Aryan culture shows traces of Babylonian influence; it does not follow, however, that Indra is of Babylonian origin.

But although his name, which has been deciphered as "In-da-ra" at Boghaz-Köi in Asia Minor, may belong to the early Iranian period, the Vedic "King of the gods"

<sup>1</sup> *2 Kings*, v, 18.



assumed a distinctly Indian character after localization in the land of the "Five Rivers"; he ultimately stepped from his chariot, drawn by the steeds of the Aryan horse tamers, and mounted an elephant; his Heaven, called Swarga, which is situated on the summit of Mount Meru, eclipses Olympus and Valhal by reason of its dazzling Oriental splendour; his combats are reflections of the natural phenomena of Hindustan.

When the hot Indian summer draws to a close, the whole land is parched and athirst for rain; rivers are low and many hill streams have dried up; man and beast are weary and await release in the breathless enervating atmosphere; they are even threatened by famine. Then dense masses of cloud gather in the sky; the tempest bellows, lightnings flash and thunder peals angrily and loud; rain descends in a deluge; once again torrents pour down from the hills and rivers become swollen and turgid. Indra has waged his battle with the Drought Demons, broken down their fortress walls, and released the imprisoned cow-clouds which give nourishment to his human "friends"; the withered pastures become green with generous and rapid growth, and the rice harvest follows.

According to Vedic myth, Indra achieved his first great victory immediately after birth. Vritra, "the encompasser", the Demon of Drought, was holding captive in his mountain fortress the cloud-cattle which he had harried in the approved manner of the Aryan raiders.<sup>1</sup> Mankind entreated the aid of the gods, "the shining ones, the world guardians":

Who will take pity? Who will bring refreshment?  
Who will come nigh to help us in distress?

<sup>1</sup> One of the sections of the epic *Mahabharata* is called "Go-Harran", which signifies "cattle harrying".





## INDRA

*From the Indra Temple, Ellora*





Counsels the thoughts within our hearts are counselling,  
Wishes are wished and soar towards the highest—  
O none but them, the shining ones, are merciful,  
My longing wings itself towards the Eternals.

Indra arose heroically to do battle for the sacrificers. Impulsively he seized the nectar of the gods, called Soma, and drank a deep draught of that intoxicating juice. Then he snatched up his thunderstone which had been fashioned by the divine artisan Twashtri, who resembles the Germanic Mimer, the "wonder smith". His "favourite bays", named the Bold and the Brown, were yoked in his golden chariot by his attendants and followers, the youthful Maruts.

Now, at the very beginning, Indra, the golden child, became the king of the three worlds. He it was who gave the air of life; he gave strength also. All the shining gods revered him and obeyed his commands. "His shadow is immortality; his shadow is death."

The Maruts, the sons of red Rudra, were the spirits of tempest and thunder. To each of their chariots were yoked two spotted deer and one swift-footed, never-wearying red deer as leader. They were stalwart and courageous youths, "full of terrible designs like to giants"; on their heads were golden helmets and they had golden breastplates, and wore bright skins on their shoulders; their ankles and arms were decked with golden bracelets. The Maruts were always strongly armed with bows and arrows and axes, and especially with gleaming spears. All beings feared those "cloud shakers" when they hastened forth with their lightning spears which "shattered cattle like the thunderstone"; they were wont to cleave cloud-rocks and drench the earth with quickening showers.

When Indra drove forth to attack the Drought



Demon, the "hastening Maruts" followed him, shouting with loud voices: in "a shower" were the Maruts "let loose"; they dashed towards the imprisoned cows of the clouds and "chased them aloft".

The dragon Vritra roared when Indra drew nigh; whereat heaven shook and the gods retreated. Mother Earth, the goddess Prithivi (prit'hi-vee), was troubled regarding her golden son. But Indra advanced boldly with the roaring Maruts; he was inspired by the hymns of the priests; he had drunken deeply of Soma; he was strengthened by the sacrifices offered on earth's altars; and he wielded the thunderstone.

The Drought Demon deemed itself invulnerable, but Indra cast his weapon and soon discovered the vulnerable parts of its writhing body. He slew the monster; it lay prone before him; the torrents burst forth and carried it away to the sea of eternal darkness. Then Indra rejoiced and cried out:

I have slain Vritra, O ye hast'ning Maruts;  
I have grown mighty through my own great vigour;  
I am the hurler of the bolt of Thunder—  
For man flow freely now the gleaming waters.

On earth the worshippers of the god were made glad; the Rishi hymned his praises:

I will extol the manly deeds of Indra:  
The first was when the Thunder stone he wielded  
And smote the Dragon; he released the waters,  
He oped the channels of the breasted mountains.

He smote the dragon Vritra in its fortress—  
Twashtri had shaped for him the thunder weapon—  
Then rushing freely like to bellowing cattle  
The gladsome waters to the sea descended.



Bull-spirited did Indra choose the Soma,  
He drank its juices from the triple ladles;  
Then clutched the Bounteous One his thunder weapon,  
And fiercely smote the first-born of the Dragons.

The smitten monster fell amidst the torrents,  
That pause nor stay, for ever surging onward;  
Then Vritra covered by the joyful billows  
Was carried to the darksome deeps of Ocean.

—*Rigveda*, i. 32.

A post-Vedic version of the encounter between Indra and the demon Vritra is given in the "Vana Parva" section of *Mahābhārata*. Although it is coloured by the change which, in the process of time, passed over the religious beliefs of the Aryans, it retains some features of the original myth which are absent in the Vedic hymns. It should be understood that, at the period referred to, the belief obtained that the gods derived their powers from the saintly Rishis,<sup>1</sup> who fed them with sacrifices and underwent terrible penances, which enabled them to support or destroy the Universe at will.

It is related that in the Krita Age (the first Age of the Universe) a host of Dānāvas (giants and demons) were so strongly armed that they were invincible in battle. They selected the dragon Vritra as their leader, and waged war against the gods, whom they scattered in all directions.

Realizing that they could not regain their power until they accomplished the death of Vritra, the Celestials appeared before their Grandsire, the Supreme Being, Brahma, the incarnation of the Soul of the Universe. Brahma instructed them to obtain the bones of a Rishi named Dadhicha, from which to construct a demon-slaying weapon. So the gods visited the Rishi and bowed

<sup>1</sup> The deified poets and sages. See Chapter VIII.



down before him, and begged the boon according to Brahma's advice.

Said Dadhicha: "O ye gods, I will renounce my body for your benefit."

Then the Rishi gave up his life, and from his bones the artisan god, Twashtri, shaped Indra's great weapon, which is called Yajra.<sup>1</sup>

Twashtri spake to Indra and said: "With this, the best of weapons, O exalted one, reduce that fierce foe of the gods to ashes! And, having slain the foe, rule thou happily the entire domain of heaven, O chief of the celestials, with those that follow thee."<sup>2</sup>

Then Indra led the gods against the mighty host. They found that Vritra was surrounded by dreaded Danavas, who resembled mountain peaks. A terrible conflict was waged, but once again the gods were put to flight. Then Indra saw Vritra growing bolder, and he became dejected. But the Supreme Being protected him and the gods endowed him with their strength, so that he became mightier than before. Thereupon Vritra was enraged, and roared loudly and fiercely, so that the heavens shook and the earth trembled with fear. Deeply agitated, Indra flung his divine weapon, which slew the leader of the Danavas. But Indra, thinking the demon was still alive, fled from the field in terror to seek shelter in a lake. The Celestials, however, perceived that Vritra had been slain, and they rejoiced greatly and shouted the praises of Indra. Then, rallying once more, the gods attacked the panic-stricken Danavas, who turned and fled to the depths of ocean. There in the fathomless dark-

<sup>1</sup> Adolf Kaegi says: "Also Vadha or Vadhar", which he compares with German, *Wetter*; O.H. German, *Wetar*; Anglo-Saxon, *Weder*; English, *Weather*. The original word signifying the sudden change in atmospheric conditions caused by the thunderstorm was ultimately applied to all states of the air.

<sup>2</sup> Roy's translation of *Mahabharata*.



ness they assembled together, and began to plot how they would accomplish the destruction of the three worlds.<sup>1</sup>

At length the dread conspirators resolved to destroy all the Rishis who were possessed of knowledge and ascetic virtue, because the world was supported by them. So they made the ocean their abode, raising billows high as hills for their protection, and they began to issue forth from their fortress to make attacks on the mighty saints.

In the Babylonian Story of Creation the female dragon Tiawath (Tiamat), whose name signifies "the sea",<sup>1</sup> desired to possess the world, and plotted against the gods with her horde of giant serpents, "raging dogs, scorpion men, fish men, and other terrible beings". The gods then selected Belus (Bel-Merodach) as their leader, and proclaimed him their king. He slew Tiawath and covered the heavens with one part of her body, and fashioned the earth with the other half. Then he set the moon and the stars in the sky, and afterwards created man: "he divided the darkness, separated the heavens from the earth, and reduced the universe to order".<sup>2</sup> The sun was the offspring of the moon.

The Indian Vedic and Epic dragon-slaying stories have evidently no connection, however, with a lost Creation myth. It is possible that they are part of the floating material from which Babylonian mythology was framed. At the same time Babylonian influences may not have been absent in the post-Vedic Age. Indra bears points of resemblance to Bel-Merodach, but he is not a Creator in the sublime sense; he is rather an artisan god like the Chinese P'an Ku, the lonely hammerman, and

<sup>1</sup> Like the giants and demons of Teutonic mythology, who fought with the gods in the Last Battle.

<sup>2</sup> *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, by T. G. Pinches, LL.D.



the Egyptian Ptah, who acquired a potter's wheel, in addition to his hammer, in the Nile valley.

Indra fashioned the universe in the simple manner that the early Aryans built their wooden houses.<sup>1</sup> How he obtained the requisite material puzzled the Vedic poets. It may be that there was a World Tree, however, like the great ash Ygdrasil of Teutonic mythology. After measuring space with the sun, Indra set up four corner posts and constructed the world walls; the roof was the cloud-thatched sky. The wide doors of the world opened to the east, and every morning they were opened to admit the sun, which Indra flung at evening into the darkness as a Neolithic man may have flung out a house torch. These doors are the "gates", celebrated in the Vedic hymns, through which the gods entered to partake of the sacrifices and libations. Indra, who is called "an accomplished artisan", is lauded as the god who "firmly secured the dominion of air in the frame of heaven and earth". In another hymn it is told: "Indra measured six broad spaces, from which no existing thing is excluded: he it is who made the wide expanse of earth and the lofty dome of the sky, even he". (V. i, 47. 3, 4.)

In the work of shaping the universe Indra is assisted by the shadowy deities Savitri, who merged with Surya, the sun god, Brihaspati, "Lord of Prayer", who merged with Agni, god of fire, and Vishnu, god of grace. He was also aided by the Ribhus, the artisans of the gods, who dwelt in the region of mid-air. Their number is given variously as three or the multiples of three; they were the sons of Sudhanvan, who was apparently identical with Indra, because "Indra is a Ribhu when he confers gifts"; indeed, the artisans are referred to as the children of the Thunder god. They make grass

<sup>1</sup> *Cosmology of Rigveda*, Wallis.





INTERIOR OF A TEMPLE TO VISHNU (BRINDABAN)





and herbs, and also channels for streams. In some respects they resemble the earth-gnomes, the Khnumu, "the modellers", the helpers of the Egyptian artisan god Ptah, who shaped the world. "Countless little figures of these gods are found in Egyptian tombs; for even as once the Khnumu had helped in the making of the world, so would they help to reconstruct in all its members the body of the dead man in whose tomb they were laid."<sup>1</sup> The Ribhus similarly renovated aged and decrepit parents; "they reunited the old cow to the calf"; they are also credited with having shaped the heavens and the earth,<sup>2</sup> and with having fashioned the "cow of plenty", and also a man named Vibhvan.<sup>3</sup>

According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, they are "the three genii of the seasons in Hindu mythology". The Sanskrit word "Ribhu" is sometimes compared with the Germanic word "Elf". Professor Macdonell considers it "likely that the Ribhus were originally terrestrial or aerial elves".<sup>4</sup> They are evidently of common origin with the Teutonic elfin artisans who are associated with Thor, the Germanic Indra.

The mother of the Ribhus was Saranyu, daughter of Twashtri, "the Hindu Vulcan", the "master workman". Twashtri forms the organism in maternal wombs and supports the races of man.<sup>5</sup> As we have seen, he was the fashioner of Indra's thunderbolt: similarly the Teutonic elfin artisan Sindre makes Thor's hammer.<sup>6</sup>

The two groups of Teutonic wonder-smiths were rivals; so were the Ribhus and Twashtri. The elfin artisans prove their skill in both cases by producing

<sup>1</sup> *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, Professor A. Wiedemann, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Rigveda*, iv, 34. 9.      <sup>3</sup> *Cosmology of Rigveda*, Wallis.

<sup>4</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 106, 107.

<sup>5</sup> *Rigveda*, ii, 53; iii, 55.      <sup>6</sup> *Teutonic Myth and Legend*, pp. 35-9.



wonderful gifts for the gods. Loke acts as a mischief-making spy in Germanic myth, and Dadyak in Indian, and both lose their heads for wagers, but save them by cunning.

The Ribhus had provided the Celestials with horses and chariots, but Twashtri fashioned a wonderful bowl which filled itself with Soma for the gods. In the contest that ensued the Ribhus transformed the bowl into four cups. "This bowl", says Professor Macdonell, "perhaps represents the moon, the four cups being its phases." One of the Ribhus was a famous archer, like the elfin artisan Egil of Teutonic mythology.

The artisan of Babylonian mythology is Ea, father of Bel-Merodach. He is "King of the abyss, creator of everything, lord of all". He was the god of artisans in general, and is identified with the sea-deity of the Persian Gulf—half-fish, half-man—who landed "during the day to teach the inhabitants the building of houses and temples, the gathering of fruits, and also geometry, law and letters". His pupils included "potters, blacksmiths, sailors, stonemasons, gardeners, farmers, &c."<sup>1</sup>

The Ribhus and Twashtri were the artisans of nature, the spirits of growth, the genii of the seasons, the elves of earth and air. Indra's close association with them emphasizes his character as a god of fertility, who brought the quickening rain, and as the corn god, and the rice god. He was the son of Father Heaven and Mother Earth, two vague deities who were never completely individualized, but were never forgotten. Heaven was the sky-god Dyaus-pita (from div = to shine), the Zeus pater of the Greeks, Jupiter of the Romans, and Tivi<sup>2</sup> (later,

<sup>1</sup> *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, T. G. Pinches, LL.D.

<sup>2</sup> An old Germanic name of Odin related to Divus. Odin's descendants were the "Tivar". (Pronounce *Dyaus* as one syllable rhiming with *mouse*.)



Odin) of the Germanic peoples, whose wife was the earth-goddess Jord, mother of Thor. The Hindu earth-mother (Terra mater) was Prithivi. Dyaus is sometimes referred to as a ruddy bull, whose bellowing is the thunder; as the Night heaven he is depicted as a black steed decked with pearls which are the stars; in one of the Vedic hymns reference is made to his "thunder-stone". Prithivi, who is sometimes symbolized as a cow, is the source of all vegetation, the supporter of earth, the female principle. She never assumes the importance of the Assyrian Ishtar, or the north Egyptian "earth-mother" Neith, or the "earth-mothers" of Europe. The Vedic Aryans were Great Father worshippers rather than Great Mother worshippers: their female deities were Night, Dawn, Earth, and the Rivers, but they were not sharply individualized until late; they are vague in the Vedas.

As the Greek Cronus (Roman Saturn) slew his father Urānus (Heaven), so did Indra slay his father Dyaus (Heaven). His earth-mother addresses him, saying: "Who has made thy mother a widow? Who has sought to slay the sleeping and the waking? What deity has been more gracious than thou, since thou hast slain thy father, having seized him by the foot?"<sup>1</sup>

The Indian father-slaying myth appears to be connected with the doctrine of reincarnation. In the *Laws of Manu* it is stated that "the husband, after conception by his wife, becomes an embryo and is born again of her; for that is the wifeness of a wife, that he is born again by her".<sup>2</sup> In the famous story of Shakuntalā, the husband is similarly referred to as the son of his wife, the son being a reincarnation of the father.<sup>3</sup> This belief

<sup>1</sup> *Rigveda*, iv, 18. Wilson, vol. iii, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> *The Laws of Manu*, ix, 8; p. 329. (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxv.)

<sup>3</sup> *Alī Parva*, sect. lxxiv of *Mahabharata*, Doy's translation.



resembles the Egyptian conception which is summed up in the phrase "husband of his mother".<sup>1</sup>

At the barley harvest in spring and the rice harvest in autumn offerings were made to the gods. A sacrificial cake of the new barley or rice was offered to Indra and Agni, a mess of old grain boiled and mixed with milk and water was given to the other gods, and a cake was also offered to Father Heaven and Mother Earth in which clarified butter was an important ingredient; or the offering might consist entirely of butter, because "clarified butter is manifestly the sap of these two, Heaven and Earth; . . . he (the offerer) therefore gladdens these two with their own sap or essence".

The reason for this harvest offering is explained as follows: The gods and the demons contended for supremacy. It chanced that the demons defiled, partly by magic and partly by poison, the plants used by men and beasts, hoping thus to overcome the gods. Men ceased to eat and the beasts stopped grazing; all creatures were about to perish because of the famine.

Said the gods: "Let us rid the plants of this."

Then they offered sacrifices and "accomplished all that they wanted to accomplish, and so did the Rishis".

A dispute then arose among the gods as to who should partake of the offerings of the firstfruits—that is, of the new plants which replaced those the demons had poisoned. It was decided to run a race to settle the matter. Indra and Agni won the race and were therefore awarded the cake. These two gods were divine Kshatriyas (noblemen), the others were "common people". Whatever Kshatriyas conquer, the commoners are permitted to share; therefore the other gods received the mess of old grain.

<sup>1</sup> See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.



After the magic spell was removed from the plants by the gods, men ate food and cattle grazed once again. Ever afterwards, at the beginning of each harvest, the first fruits were offered up to Indra and Agni. The fee of the priest was the first-born calf "for that is, as it were, the firstfruits of the cattle".<sup>1</sup>

The popular Thunder god of the Vedic period bears a close resemblance to the hard-drinking, kindly, and impulsive Thor, the Teutonic god of few words and mighty deeds, the constant "friend of man" and the inveterate enemy of demons. In the hymns Indra is pictured as a burly man, with "handsome, prominent nose", "good lips", and "comely chin"; he is "long-necked, big-bellied, strongly armed", and has a weakness for ornaments. He is much addicted to drinking "sweet, intoxicating Soma"; he "fills his stomach"; he quaffs "thirty bowls" at a single draught ere he hastens to combat against "hostile air demons". Sometimes he is placed in a difficulty when two tribes of his worshippers are in conflict: both cry to him for victory, but—

The god giveth victory unto him  
Who with generous heart pours out  
The draught he thirsts for—  
Nor feels regret in giving;  
Indra joins with him upon the battlefield.

*Rigveda*, iv, 24. 2-6.

The Aryans, who were as notorious cattle lifters as the Gauls and the Scottish Highlanders, were wont to invoke the god ere they set out on a raid, chanting with loud voices:

Indra, whose riches are boundless, O grant us  
Thousands of beautiful cows and horses:

<sup>1</sup> *The Satapatha Brahmana*, translated by Professor J. Eggeling, Part I, pp. 369, 373. (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xii.)

Destroy, thou mighty one, all who despise us,  
 Visit with death all those who would harm us, and  
 Indra, whose riches are boundless, O grant us,  
 Thousands of beautiful cows and horses.

*Wilson's translation.*

In other hymns the Thor-like character of Indra, the war god, is naively depicted. A sceptic is supposed to say: "Many men declare that there is no Indra. Who ever saw him? Why should we adore him?"

The god makes answer: "O singer, *I am*: behold me! I am here now, and I am greater than any living being. I delight in the performance of holy rites. I am also the Destroyer; I can hurl creation to ruin." *Rigveda*, viii, 89.

I never knew a man to speak so to me,  
 When all his enemies are safely conquered;  
 Yea, when they see how fierce the battle rages,  
 They even promise me a pair of bullocks.

When I am absent in far distant places,  
 Then all with open hands their gifts would bring me . . .  
 Lo! I will make the wealthy niggard needy,  
 Seize by the foot and on the hard rock dash him.

*Rigveda*, x, 27.

The lord of both the worlds hates all the haughty,  
 He cares for those who feel themselves but human.

*Rigveda*, vi, 47.<sup>1</sup>

These verses recall: "Silence, thou evil one," roared Thor, "or else with my hammer shall I strike thy head off and end thy life."

Then did Loke answer humbly: "Silent indeed I shall be now, O Thor, for I know full well thou wilt strike."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Arrowsmith's translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Teutonic Myth and Legend*, p. 173.





THE PARADISE OF INDRA

*From a Rock Sculpture at Mamallapuram*





The human qualities of Indra are illustrated in epic narrative. Arjuna, the Indian Achilles, is his son, and pays a visit to the brilliant Celestial city on the summit of Mount Meru, where flowers are ever blooming, and pretty nymphs dance to pleasure battle-slain warriors.

Arjuna saluted his divine sire. "And Indra there-upon embraced him with his round and plump arms. And taking his hand, Shakra (Indra) made him sit on a portion of his own seat . . . And the lord of the Celestials—that slayer of hostile heroes—smelt the head of Arjuna, bending in humility, and even took him upon his lap . . . Moved by affection, the slayer of Vritra touched that beautiful face with his own perfumed hands. And the wielder of the thunderbolt, patting and rubbing gently again and again with his own hands, which bore the marks of the thunderbolt, the handsome and large arms of Arjuna, which resembled a couple of golden columns and were hard in consequence of drawing the bowstring and shooting arrows, began to console him. And the slayer of Vritra . . . eyeing his son of curling locks smilingly and with eyes expanded with delight, seemed scarcely to be gratified. The more he gazed, the more he liked to gaze on. And seated on one seat, the father and son enhanced the beauty of the assembly, like the sun and moon beautifying the firmament together."<sup>1</sup>

Indra was attended in his heaven by vague spirits, called Vasus, who appear to have acted as his counsellors. When Bhishma, a hero of the great Bhārata war, was slain in battle, he was given a place among the Vasus. The Thunder god's queen is a shadowy personality, and is called Indrani.

Indra was attended by a dog, as befitted a deity of

<sup>1</sup> *Vana Parva* section of *Mahābhārata*, sect. xliii, Roy's translation.

primitive hunters. After the early Aryan period, he showed less favour for his bays and chariot, and seated himself upon a great white elephant, "the handsome and ever victorious", named Airavata; it "was furnished with four tusks" and "resembled the mountain of Kailasa with its summits".



## CHAPTER II

### The Great Vedic Deities

Agni the Fire God—Source of Life—The Divine Priest—Myths regarding his Origin—The Child God—Resemblances to Heimdal and Scyld—Messenger of the Gods—Martin Elginbrodde—Vayu or Vata, the Wind God—Teutonic Vate and Odin—The Hindu "Wild Huntsman"—Rudra the Howler—The Rain God—Sublime Varuna—The Omniscient One—Forgiver of Sins—Mitra, an ancient Deity—Babylonian Prototype—A Sun God—A Corn God—Mitanni Deities—Surya, the Sun God—The Adityas—Ushas, Goddess of Dawn—Ratri, Night—Chandra, the Moon—Identified with Soma—The Mead of the Gods—A Humorous Hymn—Sources of Life—Origin of Spitting Ceremonies.

AGNI, the fire god, was closely associated with Indra, and is sometimes called his twin brother. The pair were the most prominent deities in Vedic times: about 250 hymns are addressed to Indra and over 200 to Agni.

Indra gave the "air of life" to men; Agni symbolized the "vital spark", the principle of life in animate and inanimate Nature; he was in man, in beast, and fish; he was in plants and trees; he was in butter and in intoxicating Soma. The gods partook of the nature of Agni. In one of the post-Vedic Creation myths he is identified with the Universal soul; Brahma existed in the form of Agni ere the worlds were framed and gods and men came to be. Agni was made manifest in lightning, in celestial sun flames, in the sacred blaze rising from the altar and in homely household fires. The fire god was the divine priest as contrasted with Indra, the divine warrior.

In the Vedic invocations there are evidences that

several myths had gathered round the fascinating and wonderful fire god. One hymn refers to him as a child whose birth was kept a secret; his mother, the queen, concealed him from his sire; he was born in full vigour as a youth, and was seen sharpening his weapons at a distance from his home which he had forsaken.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes he is said to have devoured his parents at birth: this seems to signify that he consumed the fire sticks from which holy fire was produced by friction. Another hymn says that "Heaven and Earth (Dyaus and Prithivi) fled away in fear of (the incarnation of) Twashtri when he was born, but they returned to embrace the lion".<sup>2</sup>

Agni was also given ten mothers who were "twice five sisters",<sup>3</sup> but the reference is clearly explained in another passage: "The ten fingers have given him birth, the ancient, well-loved Agni, well born of his mothers".<sup>4</sup>

Dawn, with its darkness-consuming fires, and starry Night, are the sisters of Agni; "they celebrate his three births, one in the sea, one in the sky, one in the waters (clouds)". Typical of the Oriental mind is the mysterious reference to Agni's "mothers" owing their origin to him. The poet sings:

Who among you hath understood the hidden (god)?  
The calf has by itself given birth to its  
mothers.

Professor Oldenberg, who suggests that the waters are the "mothers", reasons in Oriental mode: "Smoke is Agni, it goes to the clouds, the clouds become waters".<sup>5</sup>

In his early humanized form Agni bears some resemblance to Heimdal, the Teutonic sentinel god, who has

<sup>1</sup> *Rigveda*, v, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Rigveda*, i, 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Rigveda*, iv, 6. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Rigveda*, iii, 23. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Rigveda*, i, 95. 4, and note, Oldenberg's *Vedic Hymns* (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlvj).





AGNI, THE FIRE GOD

*From a painting by Nanda Lal Bose*

(By permission of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta)





nine mothers, the daughters of sea-dwelling Ran, and is thus also a "son of the waters"; he is clad in silvern armour, and on his head is a burnished helmet with ram's horns. Horsed on his swift steed, Gulltop, he watches the demons who seek to attack the citadel of the gods. . . . His sight is so keen that he can see by night as well as by day. . . . Heimdal is loved both by gods and by men, and he is also called Gullintani because his teeth are of gold. There was a time when he went to Midgard (the earth) as a child; he grew up to be a teacher among men and was named Scef. Scef is identified as the patriarch Scyld in *Beowulf*, who came over the sea as a child and rose to be the king of a tribe. Mankind were descended from Heimdal-Scef: three sons were born to him of human mothers—Thrall, from whom thralls are descended; Churl, the sire of freemen, and Jarl from whom nobles have sprung.<sup>1</sup>

In *Mahabharata* there is a fragment of an old legend which relates the origin of Karna, the son of Queen Pritha and the sun god: the birth of the child is concealed, and he is placed in a basket which is set afloat on the river and is carried to a distant country.<sup>2</sup>

One of the Vedic references to Agni, as we have seen, suggests an origin similar to Karna of the epic period. He was connected with the introduction of agriculture like the Teutonic Scef, which signifies "Sheaf". Agni is stated to have been "carried in the waters. . . . The great one has grown up in the wide unbounded space. The waters (have made) Agni (grow)".<sup>3</sup> Agni is "sharp faced" (i, 95); he is "the bright, brilliant, and shining one" (iv, 1. 7); he is "gold toothed" (v, 22); he sees "even over the darkness of night" (i, 94. 7); he "makes

<sup>1</sup> *Teutonic Myth and Legend*, pp. 16 and 187-9.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter X.

<sup>3</sup> Oldenberg, *Rigveda*, iii, 1.



all things visible"; he conquers the godless, wicked wiles; he sharpens his two horns in order to pierce Rakshasas (giants) (v, 2). "O Agni, strike away with thy weapons those who curse us, the malicious ones, all ghouls, be they near or far" (i, 94. 9). Heimdal blows a trumpet in battle; Agni is "roaring like a bull" (i, 94. 10).

As Heimdal, in his Scef-child form, was sent to mankind by the gods, "Matarisvan<sup>1</sup> brought Agni to Bhrigu as a gift, precious like wealth, of double birth, the carrier, the famous, the beacon of the sacrifice, the ready, the immediately successful messenger. . . . The Bhrigus worshipping him in the abode of the waters have verily established him among the clans of Ayu. The people have established beloved Agni among the human clans as (people) going to settle (establish) Mitra" (i, 60). Oldenberg explains that people going anywhere secure safety by ceremonies addressed to Mitra, i.e. by concluding alliances under the protection of Mitra. Another reference reads, "Agni has been established among the tribes of men, the son of the waters, Mitra acting in the right way". Oldenberg notes that Mitra is here identified with Agni; Mitra also means "friend" or "ally" (iii, 5. 3, and note). Scyld in *Beowulf*, the mysterious child of the sea, became a king over men. Agni "indeed is king, leading all beings to gloriousness. As soon as born from here, he looks over the whole world. . . . Agni, who has been looked and longed for in Heaven, who has been looked for on earth—he who has been looked for has entered all herbs" (i, 98).<sup>2</sup> To Agni's love affairs upon earth there are epic references, and in the "Vishnu Purana" he is mentioned as the father of three human sons.

<sup>1</sup> A demi-god.

<sup>2</sup> *Vedic Hymns*, trans. by Oldenberg. (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlv.)



The reference to the Bhrigus, to whom Agni is carried, is of special interest. This tribe did not possess fire and were searching for it (*Rigveda*, x. 40. 2). In another poem the worshippers of Agni are "human people descended from Manush (Manu)" (vi, 48. 8). The Bhrigus were a priestly family descended from the patriarch Bhrigu: Manu was the first man. Two of the Teutonic patriarch names are Berchter and Mannus.

Agni was the messenger of the gods; he interceded with the gods on behalf of mankind and conducted the bright Celestials to the sacrifice. The priest chanted at the altar:

Agni, the divine ministrant of the sacrifice, the greatest bestower of treasures; may one obtain through Agni wealth and welfare day by day, which may bring glory and high bliss of valiant offspring.

Agni, whatever sacrifice and worship thou encompassst on every side, that indeed goes to the gods. Thou art King of all worship. . . . Conduct the gods hither in an easy-moving chariot.<sup>1</sup>

Like Indra, Agni was a heavy consumer of Soma; his intensely human side is not lost in mystic Vedic poetry.

Agni, accept this log, conqueror of horses, thou who lovest songs and delightest in riches . . .

Thou dost go wisely between these two creations (Heaven and Earth) like a friendly messenger between two hamlets . . .

His worshippers might address him with great familiarity, as in the following extracts:—

If I were thee and thou wert me, thine aspirations should be fulfilled. *Rigveda*, xiii, 44. 23.

<sup>1</sup> *Rigveda*, i, 13 and i, 26 (Oldenberg).

If, O Agni, thou wert a mortal and I an immortal,  
 I would not abandon thee to wrong or to  
 penury: my worshippers should not be poor,  
 nor distressed, nor miserable. *Rigveda*, viii, 19.

These appeals are reminiscent of the quaint graveyard inscription:

Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde.  
 Hae mercy on my soul, Lord God,  
 As I wad dae were I Lord God,  
 And ye were Martin Elginbrodde.

The growth of monotheistic thought is usually evinced in all mythologies by the tendency to invest a popular deity with the attributes of other gods. Agni is sometimes referred to as the sky god and the storm god. In one of the hymns he is entreated to slay demons and send rain as if he were Indra:

O Agni, overcome our enemies and our calamities;  
 Drive away all disease and the Rakshasas—  
 Send down abundance of waters  
 From the ocean of the sky. *Rigveda*, x, 98. 12.

Indra similarly absorbed, and was absorbed by, the wind god Vayu or Vata, who is also referred to as the father of the Maruts and the son-in-law of the artisan god Twashtri. The name Vata has been compared to Vate, the father of the Teutonic Volund or Wieland, the tribal deity of the Watlings or Vaetlings; in old English the Milky Way was "Watling Street". Comparisons have also been drawn with the wind god Odin—the Anglo-Saxon Woden, and ancient German Wuotan (pronounced Vuotan). "The etymological connection in this view", writes a critic, "is not free from difficulty."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Art. "Aryan Religion", Hastings' *Ency. Rel. and Ethics*.



Professor Macdonell favours the derivation from "va" = "to blow".

The Indian Vata is invoked, as Vayu, in a beautiful passage in one of the hymns which refers to his "two red horses yoked to the chariot": he had also, like the Maruts, a team of deer. The poet calls to the wind:

Awake Purandhu (Morning) as a lover awakes a sleeping  
maid. . . . Reveal heaven and earth. . . .  
Brighten the dawn, yea, for glory, brighten the dawn. . . .

These lines recall Keats at his best:

There is no light  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown . . .  
*Ode to the Nightingale.*

A stirring hymn to the wind god loses much of its vigour and beauty in translation:

Sublime and shining is the car of Vata;  
It sweeps resounding, thundering and crashing;  
Athwart the sky it wakens ruddy flashes,  
Or o'er the earth it sets the dust-clouds whirling.

The gusts arise and hasten unto Vata,  
Like women going to a royal banquet;  
In that bright car the mighty god is with them,  
For he is rajah of the earth's dominions.

When Vata enters on the paths of heaven,  
All day he races on; he never falters;  
He is the firstborn and the friend of Ocean—  
Whence did he issue forth? Where is his birthplace?

He is the breath<sup>1</sup> of gods: all life is Vata:  
He cometh, yea, he goeth as he listeth:  
His voice is heard; his form is unbeholden—  
O let us offer sacrifice to Vata. *Rigveda*, x, 168.

<sup>1</sup> The air of life = the spirit.

Another wind or storm god is Rudra, also the father of the Maruts, who are called "Rudras". He is the "Howler" and "the Ruddy One", and rides a wild boar. Saussaye calls him "the Wild Huntsman of Hindu Mythology". He is chiefly of historical interest because he developed into the prominent post-Vedic god Shiva, the "Destroyer", who is still worshipped in India. The poets invested him with good as well as evil qualities:

Rudra, thou smiter of workers of evil,  
The doers of good all love and adore thee.  
Preserve me from injury and every affliction—  
Rudra, the nourisher.

Give unto me of thy medicines, Rudra,  
So that my years may reach to a hundred;  
Drive away hatred, shatter oppression,  
Ward off calamity. *Rigveda*, ii, 33.

The rain cloud was personified in Parjanya, who links with Indra as the nourisher of earth, and with Agni as the quickener of seeds.

Indra's great rival, however, was Varuna, who symbolized the investing sky: he was "the all-enveloping one". The hymns impart to him a character of Hebraic grandeur. He was the sustainer of the universe, the law-giver, the god of moral rectitude, and the sublime sovereign of gods and men. Men worshipped him with devoutness, admiration, and fear. "It is he who makes the sun to shine in heaven; the winds that blow are but his breath; he has hollowed out the channels of the rivers which flow at his command, and he has made the depths of the sea. His ordinances are fixed and unassailable; through their operation the moon walks in brightness, and the stars which appear in the nightly sky,





SHIVA'S DANCE OF DESTRUCTION, ELLORA (see pages 147-8)





vanish in daylight. The birds flying in the air, the rivers in their sleepless flow, cannot attain a knowledge of his power and wrath. But he knows the flight of the birds in the sky, the course of the far-travelling wind, the paths of ships on the ocean, and beholds all secret things that have been or shall be done. He witnesses men's truth and falsehood."<sup>1</sup>

He is the Omniscient One. Man prayed to him for forgiveness for sin, and to be spared from the consequences of evil-doing:

May I not yet, King Varuna,  
Go down into the house of clay:  
Have mercy, spare me, mighty Lord.

O Varuna, whatever the offence may be  
That we as men commit against the heavenly folk,  
When through our want of thought we violate thy laws,  
Chastise us not, O god, for that iniquity.

*Rigveda*, vii, 89.<sup>2</sup>

His messengers descend  
Countless from his abode—for ever traversing  
This world and scanning with a thousand eyes its inmates.  
Whate'er exists within this earth, and all within the sky,  
Yea, all that is beyond, King Varuna perceives. . . .  
May thy destroying snares, cast sevenfold round the wicked,  
Entangle liars, but the truthful spare, O King!

*Rigveda*, iv, 16.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the devotional spirit pervading the Varuna hymns is the attitude adopted by Indra's worshippers; the following prayer to the god of battle is characteristic:—

O Indra, grant the highest, best of treasures,  
A judging mind, prosperity abiding,

<sup>1</sup> Muir's *Original Sanscrit Texts*, v, 58, ff.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Macdonell's *A History of Sanskrit Literature*.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Wisdom*, Sir Monier Williams.

Riches abundant, lasting health of body,  
The grace of eloquence and days propitious.

*Rigveda*, ii, 21. 6.

The sinner's fear of Varuna prompted him to seek the aid of other gods. Rudra and the Moon are addressed:

O remove ye the sins we have sinned,  
What evil may cling to us sever  
With bolts and sharp weapons, kind friends,  
And gracious be ever.  
From the snare of Varuna deliver us, ward us,  
Ye warm-hearted gods, O help us and guard us.

Associated with Varuna was the God Mitra (the Persian Mithra). These deities are invariably coupled and belong to the early Iranian period. Much controversy has been waged over their pre-Vedic significance. Some have regarded Mithra as the firmament by day with its blazing and fertilizing sun, and Varuna as the many-eyed firmament of night, in short, the twin forms of Dyaus. Prof. E. V. Arnold has shown, however, that in the Vedas, Mithra has no solar significance except in his association with Agni. The fire god, as we have seen, symbolized the principle of fertility in Nature: he was the "vital spark" which caused the growth of "all herbs", as well as the illuminating and warmth-giving flames of sun and household hearth.

Mitra as Mithra with Varuna, and a third vague god, Aryaman, belong to an early group of equal deities called the Adityas, or "Celestial deities". "It would seem that the worship of these deities", says Prof. Arnold, "was already decaying in the earliest Vedic period, and that many of them were then falling into oblivion. . . . In a late Vedic hymn we find that Indra boasts that he has dethroned Varuna, and invites Agni to enter his own



service instead. We may justly infer from all these circumstances that the worship of the 'celestials' occupied at one time in the history of the race a position of greater importance than its place in the *Rigveda* directly suggests."<sup>1</sup>

The following extracts from a Mitra-Varuna hymn indicate the attitude of the early priests towards the "Celestial deities":—

To the gods Mitra and Varuna let our praise go forth with power, with all reverence, to the two of mighty race.

These did the gods establish in royal power over themselves, because they were wise and the children of wisdom, and because they excelled in power.

They are protectors of hearth and home, of life and strength; Mitra and Varuna, prosper the mediations of your worshippers. . . .

As the sun rises to-day do I salute Mitra and Varuna, and glorious Aryaman. . . . The blessings of heaven are our desire. . . .

*Prof. Arnold's translation.*

In Babylonian mythology the sun is the offspring of the moon. The Semitic name of the sun god is Samas (Shamash), the Sumerian name is Utu; among other non-Semitic names was Mitra, "apparently the Persian Mithra". The bright deity also "bears the names of his attendants 'Truth' and 'Righteousness', who guided him upon his path as judge of the earth".<sup>2</sup>

It may be that the Indian Mitra was originally a sun god; the religion of the sun god Mithra spread into Europe. "Dedications to Mithra the Unconquered Sun have been found in abundance."<sup>3</sup> Vedic references suggest that Mitra had become a complex god in the pre-

<sup>1</sup> *The Rigveda*, by Professor E. Vernon Arnold, p. 16 (*Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance, and Folklore*).

<sup>2</sup> *The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*, by Dr. T. G. Pinches, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Frazer's "Golden Bough" (*Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 255, n., third edition).



Vedic Age, being probably associated with a group of abstract deities—his attributes symbolized—who are represented by the Adityas. The Mitra-Varuna group of Celestials were the source of all heavenly gifts; they regulated sun and moon, the winds and waters and the seasons. If we assume that they were of Babylonian or Sumerian origin—deities imported by a branch of Aryan settlers who had been in contact with Babylonian civilization—their rivalry with the older Aryan gods, Indra and Agni, can be understood. Ultimately they were superseded, but the influence exercised by their cult remained and left its impress upon later Aryan religious thought.

The Assyrian word "metru" signifies rain.<sup>1</sup> The quickening rain which caused the growth of vegetation was, of course, one of the gifts of the Celestials of the firmament. It is of interest to note, therefore, in this connection that Professor Frazer includes the western Mithra among the "corn gods". Dealing with Mithraic sculptures, which apparently depict Mithra as the sacrificer of the harvest bull offering, he says: "On certain of these monuments the tail of the bull ends in three stalks of corn, and in one of them cornstalks instead of blood are seen issuing from the wound inflicted by the knife".<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on the Assyrian "metru" Professor Moulton says: "If this is his (Mithra's) origin, we get a reasonable basis for the Avestan (Early Persian and Aryan) use of the word to denote a 'contract', as also for the fact that the deity is in the Avesta patron of Truth and in the Veda of Friendship. He is 'the Mediator' between Heaven and Earth, as the firmament was by

<sup>1</sup> Professor H. W. Hogg, in Professor Moulton's *Early Religious Poetry of Persia*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> "The Golden Bough" (*Spirits of the Corn and Wild*, vol. II, p. 10).



its position, both in nature and mythology: an easy corollary is his function of regulating the relations of man and man."

The character of an imported deity is always influenced by localization and tribal habits. Pastoral nomads would therefore have emphasized the friendliness of Mithra, who sent rain to cause the growth of grass on sun-parched steppes. Both Mithra and Varuna had their dwelling-place in the sea of heaven, the waters "above the firmament" from which the rain descended. Ultimately the Indian Mitra vanished, being completely merged in Varuna, who became the god of ocean after the Aryans reached the sea coast. In post-Vedic sacred literature the priestly theorists, in the process of systematizing their religious beliefs, taught that a great conflict took place between the gods and demons. When order was restored, the various deities were redistributed. Indra remained the atmospheric god of battle, and Varuna became the god of ocean, where, as the stern judge and lawgiver and the punisher of wrongdoers, he kept watch over the demons. In the "Nala and Damayanti" epic narrative, the four "world guardians" are: Indra, king of the gods; Agni, god of fire; Varuna, god of waters; and Yama, judge of the dead.

It may be that the displacement of Varuna as supreme deity was due to the influence of the fire-worshipping cult of Agni, who was imported by certain unidentified Aryan tribes that entered India. Agni did not receive recognition, apparently, from the other Aryan "folk-wave", which established a military aristocracy at Mitanni in Mesopotamia, and held sway for a period over the Assyrians and some of the Hittite tribes. An important inscription, which is dated about 1400 B.C., has been deciphered at Boghaz-Köi in Asia Minor by Professor



Hugo Winckler, who gives the names of the following deities :

“Mi-it-ra, Uru-w-na, In-da-ra, and Na-sa-at-ti-ia”—

Mitra, Varuna, Indra, Nasatya. The latter is Nasatyau, the Vedic Aswins, twin gods of morning, who have been compared to the Greek Dioskouri (Castor and Pollux), sons of Zeus.

A Vedic triad, which suggests a rival cult to that of the worshippers of Varuna and other Adityas, is formed by Vayu (wind), Agni (fire), and Surya (the sun).

The Indian sun god Surya, like the Egyptian Ra, had three forms. The rising sun was Vivasvat; the setting sun was Savitri.

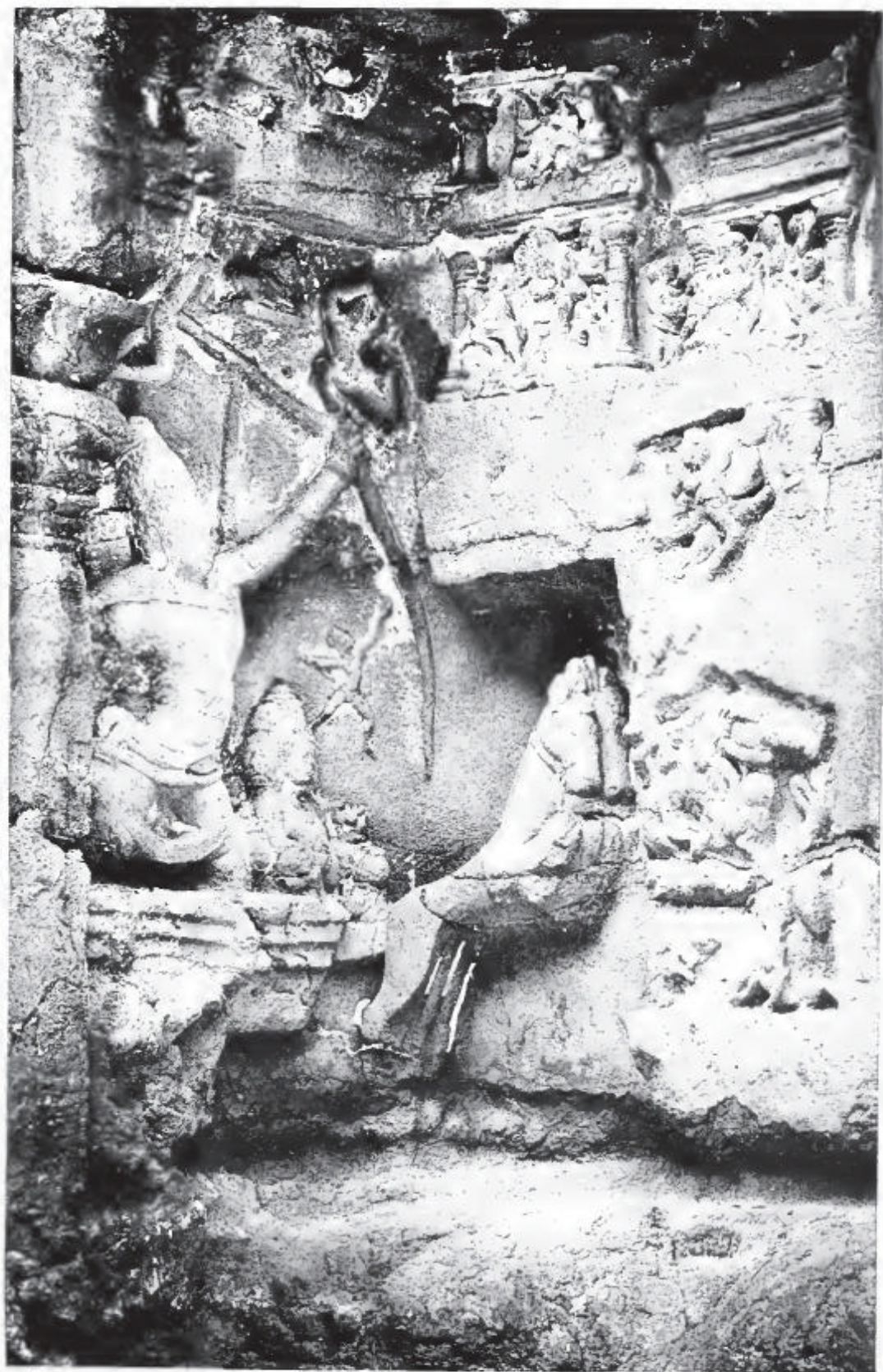
Vivasvat was the son-in-law of Twashtri, the artisan of Nature; he was an abstract deity, and apparently owed his origin to the group of Adityas.

Savitri, who had yellow hair, was of pre-Vedic origin. He was the “Stimulator”. When he commanded Night to approach, men ceased their labours, birds sought their nests, and cattle their sheds.<sup>1</sup>

During the long centuries covered by the Vedic period many “schools of thought” must have struggled for supremacy. The Vivasvat myth belongs, it would appear, to the time before the elephant was tamed by the Aryans. Aditi, the mother of the Adityas, who is believed to be of later origin than her children, had eight sons. She cherished seven of them; the eighth, which was a shapeless lump, was thrown away, but was afterwards moulded into Vivasvat, the sun; the pieces of the lump which were cast away by the divine artisan fell upon the earth and gave origin to the elephant, therefore elephants should not be caught, because they partake of divine nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Rigveda*, ii, 38.





SURYA IN HIS CHARIOT

*From the Kailāsa Temple, Ellora*





Surya is an Aryanized sun god. He drives a golden chariot drawn by seven mares, or a mare with seven heads; he has golden hair and golden arms and hands. As he is alluded to as "the eye of Varuna and Mitra", and a son of Aditi, it is evident that if he did not originally belong to the group of Adityas, he was strongly influenced by them. In his Savitri character, which he possesses at morning as well as at evening, he stimulates all life and the mind of man. One of the most sacred and oldest mantras (texts) in the Vedas is still addressed by Brahmans to the rising sun. It runs:—

Let us meditate on that excellent glory of the divine Vivifier,  
May he enlighten (or stimulate) our understandings.<sup>1</sup>

The feeling for Nature pervades the ancient religion and literature of India. Priests were poets and singers in early Vedic times. A Rishi was a composer of hymns to the gods, and several are named in the collections. Every great family appears to have had its bardic priest, and its special poetic anthology which was handed down from generation to generation. Old poems might be rewritten and added to, but the ambition of the sacred poet was to sing a new song to the gods. The oldest Vedic hymns are referred to as "new songs", which suggests that others were already in existence.

These Rishis looked upon Nature with the poet's eye. They symbolized everything, but they revelled also in the gorgeous beauty of dawn and evening, the luxuriance of Indian trees and flowers, the serene majesty of Himalayan mountains, the cascades, the rivers, and the shining lakes. The wonder and mystery of the world inspired their hymns and their religion. Even the gods took delight in the songs of birds, the harping of forest

winds, the humming of bees, the blossoming trees, and the flower-decked sward. Heaven has its eternal summer and soft scented winds, its lotus-gemmed lakes and never-fading blooms.

The effulgence and silence of dawn inspired some of the most beautiful Vedic hymns. Dawn is Ushas, the daughter of Dyaus; she is the Indian Aurora:

Hail, ruddy Ushas, golden goddess, borne  
 Upon thy shining car, thou comest like  
 A lovely maiden by her mother decked,  
 Disclosing coyly all thy hidden graces  
 To our admiring eyes; or like a wife  
 Unveiling to her lord, with conscious pride,  
 Beauties which, as he gazes lovingly,  
 Seem fresher, fairer, each succeeding morn.  
 Through years and years thou hast lived on, and yet  
 Thou'rt ever young. Thou art the breath of life  
 Of all that breathes and lives, awaking day by day  
 Myriads of prostrate sleepers, as from death,  
 Causing the birds to flutter from their nests,  
 And rousing men to ply with busy feet  
 Their daily duties and appointed tasks,  
 Toiling for wealth, or pleasure, or renown.<sup>1</sup>

The Vedic poets "looked before and after". One sang:

In ages past did mortals gaze  
 On Ushas veiled in gleaming gold.  
 We who are living watch her rays,  
 And men unborn will her behold.

*Rigveda*, i, 113. 11.

Night, Ratri, is the sister of Dawn. The one robes herself in crimson and gold; the other adorns her dark raiment with gleaming stars. When benevolent Ratri draws nigh, men turn towards their homes to rest, birds

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Wisdom*, Sir Monier Williams.



seek their nests, cattle lie down; even the hawk reposes. The people pray to the goddess to be protected against robbers and fierce wolves, and to be taken safely across her shadow:

She, the immortal goddess, throws her veil  
Over low valley, rising ground, and hill.  
But soon with bright effulgence dissipates  
The darkness she produces; soon advancing  
She calls her sister Morning to return,  
And then each darksome shadow melts away.

*Rigveda, x.<sup>1</sup>*

The moon is the god Chandra, who became identified with Soma. Among ancient peoples the moon was regarded as the source of fertility and growth; it brought dew to nourish crops which ripened under the "harvest moon"; it filled all vegetation with sap; it swayed human life from birth till death; it influenced animate and inanimate Nature in its periods of increase and decline; ceremonies to secure offspring were performed during certain phases of the moon.

Soma was the intoxicating juice of the now unknown Soma plant, which inspired mortals and was the nectar of the gods. The whole ninth book of the *Rigveda* is devoted to the praises of Soma, who is exalted even as the chief god, the Father of all.

This Soma is a god; he cures  
The sharpest ills that man endures.  
He heals the sick, the sad he cheers,  
He nerves the weak, dispels their fears;  
The faint with martial ardour fires,  
With lofty thought the bard inspires,  
The soul from earth to heaven he lifts,  
So great and wondrous are his gifts;

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Wisdom*, Sir Monier Williams.

Men feel the god within their veins,  
 And cry in loud exulting strains:  
 We've quaffed the Soma bright  
 And are immortal grown:  
 We've entered into light  
 And all the gods have known.  
 What mortal now can harm,  
 Or foeman vex us more?  
 Through thee beyond alarm,  
 Immortal god, we soar.<sup>1</sup>

"The sun", declared one of the poets, "has the nature of Agni, the moon of Soma." At the same time Agni was a great consumer of Soma; when it was poured on the altar, the fire god leapt up joyfully. The beverage was the "water of life" which was believed to sustain the Adityas and the earth, and to give immortality to all the gods; it was therefore called Amrita (ambrosia).

As in Teutonic mythology, the Hindu giants desired greatly to possess the "mead" to which the gods owed their power and supremacy. The association of Soma with the moon recalls the Germanic belief that the magic mead was kept for Odin, "the champion drinker", by Mani, the moon god, who snatched it from the mythical children who are the prototypes of "Jack and Jill" of the nursery rhyme.<sup>2</sup> Indra was the discoverer of the Soma plant and brought it from the mountains. The Persian mead (mada) was called Haoma.

The priests drank Soma when they made offerings and lauded the gods. A semi-humorous Rigvedic hymn compares them to the frogs which croak together when the rain comes after long drought.

Each (frog) with merry croak and loudly calling  
 Salutes the other, as a son his father;

<sup>1</sup> Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, v, 130.

<sup>2</sup> See *Teutonic Myth and Legend*.



What one calls out, another quickly answers,  
Like boys at school their teacher's words repeating. . . .  
They shout aloud like Brahmans drunk with Soma,  
When they perform their annual devotions.

*Rigveda*, vii, 103.<sup>1</sup>

There are references in the *Rigveda* to the marriage of Soma, the moon, and Suryá, the maiden of the sun.

In Vedic religion many primitive beliefs were blended. We have seen, for instance, that life was identified with breath and wind; the "spirit" left the body as the last breath. Agni worshippers regarded fire as "the vital spark". Soma worship, on the other hand, appears to be connected with the belief that life was in the blood; it was literally "the life blood". The "blood of trees" was the name for sap; sap was water impregnated or vitalized by Soma, the essence of life. Water worship and Soma worship were probably identical, the moon, which was believed to be the source of growth and moisture, being the fountain head of "the water of life". In Teutonic mythology the "mead" is taken from a hidden mountain spring, which issued from "Mimer's well" in the Underworld. Odin drank from Mimer's well and obtained wisdom and long life. The "mead" was transported to the moon. The "mead" was also identified with saliva, the moisture of life, and spitting ceremonies resulted; these survive in the custom still practised in our rural districts of spitting on the hand to seal a bargain; "spitting stones" have not yet entirely disappeared. Vows are still taken in India before a fire. References to contracts signed in blood are common and widespread.

<sup>1</sup> Kaegi's *Rigveda*, Arrowsmith's translation. This was apparently a rain charm; its humour was of the unconscious order, of course.

## CHAPTER III

# Yama, the First Man, and King of the Dead

Burial Customs—Inhumation and Cremation—Yama the First Man—The Discoverer of Paradise—His Twin Sister—Persian Twin Deities—Yama and Mitra—Yama as Judge of the Dead—The “Man in the Eye”—Brahman’s Deal with Dharma-Yama—Sacrifice for a Wife—Story of Princess Savitri—Her Husband’s Fate—How she rescued his Soul from Yama—The Heavens of Yama, Indra, and Varuna—Teutonic, Greek, and Celtic Heavens—Paradise denied to Childless Men—Religious Need for a Son—Exposure of Female Infants—Infanticide in Modern India—A Touching Incident.

In early Vedic times the dead might be either buried or cremated. These two customs were obviously based upon divergent beliefs regarding the future state of existence. A Varuna hymn makes reference to the “house of clay”, which suggests that among some of the Aryan tribes the belief originally obtained that the spirits of the dead hovered round the place of sepulture. Indeed, the dread of ghosts is still prevalent in India; they are supposed to haunt the living until the body is burned.

Those who practised the cremation ceremony in early times appear to have conceived of an organized Hades, to which souls were transferred through the medium of fire, which drove away all spirits and demons who threatened mankind. Homer makes the haunting ghost of Patroklos exclaim, “Never again will I return from Hades when I have received my meed of fire”.<sup>1</sup> The Vedic worshippers

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad*, xxiii, 75.



of Agni burned their dead for the same reason as did the ancient Greeks. "When the remains of the deceased have been placed on the funeral pile, and the process of cremation has commenced, Agni, the god of fire, is prayed not to scorch or consume the departed, not to tear asunder his skin or his limbs, but, after the flames have done their work, to convey to the fathers the mortal who has been presented to him as an offering. Leaving behind on earth all that is evil and imperfect, and proceeding by the paths which the fathers trod, invested with a lustre like that of the gods, it soars to the realms of eternal light in a car, or on wings, and recovers there its ancient body in a complete and glorified form; meets with the forefathers who are living in festivity with Yama; obtains from him, when recognized by him as one of his own, a delectable abode, and enters upon more perfect life, which is crowned with the fulfilment of all desires, is passed in the presence of the gods, and employed in the fulfilment of their pleasure."<sup>1</sup>

Agni is the god who is invoked by the other deities, "Make straight the pathways that lead to the gods; be kind to us, and carry the sacrifice for us".<sup>2</sup>

In this connection, however, Professor Macdonell says, "Some passages of the *Rigveda* distinguish the path of the fathers or dead ancestors from the path of the gods, doubtless because cremation appeared as a different process from sacrifice".<sup>3</sup>

It would appear that prior to the practice of cremation a belief in Paradise ultimately obtained: the dead walked on foot towards it. Yama, King of the Dead, was the first man.<sup>4</sup> Like the Aryan pioneers who discovered the

<sup>1</sup> Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, v. 302.

<sup>2</sup> *Rigveda*, x. 51 (Arnold's translation).

<sup>3</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> As was also Manu of a different or later cult.



Punjab, he explored the hidden regions and discovered the road which became known as "the path of the fathers".

To Yama, mighty king, be gifts and homage paid.  
He was the first of men that died, the first to brave  
Death's rapid rushing stream, the first to point the road  
To heaven, and welcome others to that bright abode.

*Sir M. Monier Williams' translation.*<sup>1</sup>

Professor Macdonell gives a new rendering of a Vedic hymn<sup>2</sup> in which Yama is referred to as follows:

Him who along the mighty heights departed,  
Him who searched and spied the path for many,  
Son of Vivasvat, gatherer of the people,  
Yama the king, with sacrifices worship.

*Rigveda*, x, 14. 1.

Yama and his sister Yamī, the first human pair, are identical with the Persian Yima and Yimeh of Avestan literature; they are the primeval "twins", the children of Vivasvat, or Vivasvant, in the *Rigveda* and of Vivahvant in the *Avesta*. *Yama* signifies twin, and Dr. Rendel Harris, in his researches on the Greek Dioscuri cult, shows that among early peoples the belief obtained widely that one of each pair of twins was believed to be a child of the sky. "This conjecture is borne out by the name of Yama's father (Vivasvant), which may well be a cult-epithet of the bright sky, 'shining abroad' (from the root *vas*, 'to shine')". . . In the *Avesta* 'Yima, the bright' is referred to: he is the Jamshid of Fitzgerald's Omar.<sup>3</sup>

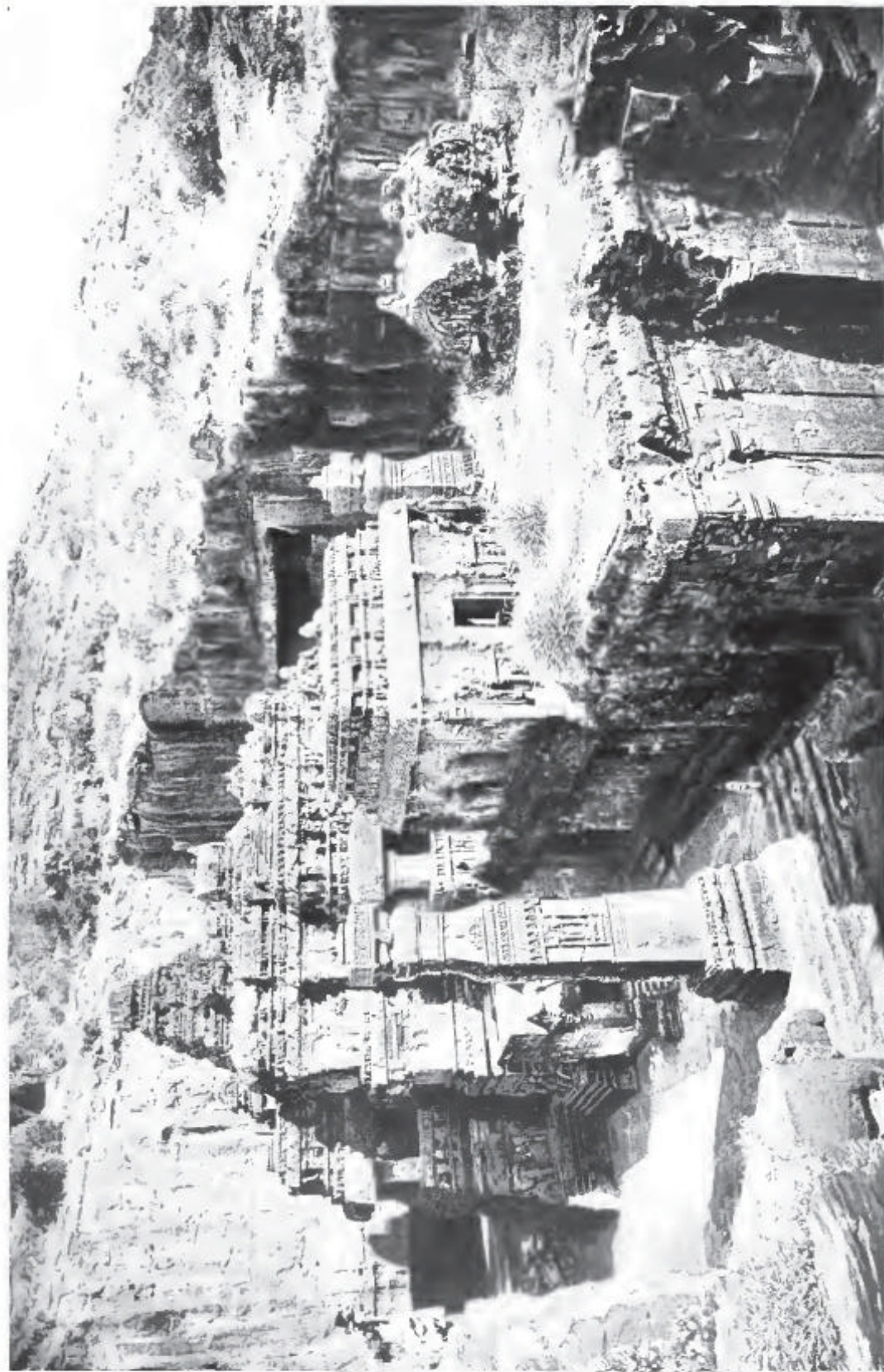
Yima, the Iranian ruler of Paradise, is also identical with Mitra (Mithra), whose cult "obtained from 200-400 A.D. a world-wide diffusion in the Roman Empire,

<sup>1</sup> From *Indian Wisdom*.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> *Early Religious Poetry of Persia*, Professor J. H. Moulton, p. 42.





THE KAILASA TEMPLE OF SHIVA, ELLORA





and came nearer to monotheism than the cult of any other god in paganism".<sup>1</sup>

Professor Moulton wonders if the Yama myth "owed anything to Babylon?" It is possible that the worshippers of Agni represented early Iranian beliefs, and that the worshippers of Mitra, Varuna, and the twins (Yama and Yima and the twin Aswins) were influenced by Babylonian mythology as a result of contact, and that these opposing sects were rivals in India in early Vedic times.

In one of the hymns<sup>2</sup> Yami is the wooer of her brother Yama. She declares that they were at the beginning intended by the gods to be husband and wife, but Yama replies:

"Who has sure knowledge of that earliest day? Who has seen it with his eyes and can tell of it? Lofty is the law of Mitra and Varuna; how canst thou dare to speak as a temptress?"

*Arnold's translation.*

In the Vedic "land of the fathers", the shining Paradise, the two kings Varuna and Yama sit below a tree. Yama, a form of Mitra, plays on a flute and drinks Soma with the Celestials, because Soma gives immortality. He gathers his people to him as a shepherd gathers his flock: indeed he is called the "Noble Shepherd". He gives to the faithful the draught of Soma; apparently unbelievers were destroyed or committed to a hell called Put. Yama's messengers were the pigeon and the owl; he had also two brindled watch-dogs, each with four eyes. The dead who had faithfully fulfilled religious ordinances were addressed:

Fear not to pass the guards—  
The four-eyed brindled dogs—that watch for the departed.

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Professor Macdonell, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Rigveda*, I, 10.



Return unto thy home, O soul! Thy sin and shame  
 Leave thou behind on earth; assume a shining form—  
 Thine ancient shape—refined and from all taint set free.

*Sir M. Monier Williams' translation.*<sup>1</sup>

Yama judged men as Dharma-rajah, "King of righteousness"; he was Pitripati, "lord of the fathers"; Samavurti, "the impartial judge"; Kritana, "the finisher"; Antaka, "he who ends life"; Samana, "the leveller", &c.

In post-Vedic times he presided over a complicated system of Hells; he was Dandadhara, "the wielder of the rod or mace". He had a noose with which to bind souls; he carried out the decrees of the gods, taking possession of souls at their appointed time.

In one of the *Brahmanas* death, or the soul which Death claims as his own, is "the man in the eye". The reflection of a face in the pupil of the eye was regarded with great awe by the early folk; it was the spirit looking forth. We read, "Now that man in yonder orb (of the sun) and that man in the right eye truly are no other than Death; his feet have stuck fast in the heart, and having pulled them out, he comes forth; and when he comes forth then that man dies; whence they say of him who has passed away, '*he has been cut off*' (life or life-string has been severed)".<sup>2</sup>

Yama might consent to prolong the life of one whose days had run out, on condition that another individual gave up part of his own life in compensation; he might even agree to restore a soul which he had bound to carry away, in response to the appeal of a mortal who had attained to great piety. The Vedic character of Yama survives sometimes in Epic narrative even after cremation

<sup>1</sup> From *Indian Wisdom*.

<sup>2</sup> *Satapatha Brahmana*, translated by Professor Eggeling, Part IV, 1897, p. 371 (*Sacred Books of the East*).



had become general. The following two touching and beautiful stories, preserved in *Mahabharata*, are probably very ancient Aryan folk tales which were cherished by the people and retold by the poets, who attached to them later religious beliefs and practices.

## THE BRAHMAN AND HIS BRIDE

Once upon a time Menaka, the beautiful Apsara (celestial fairy), who is without shame or pity, left beside a hermitage her new-born babe, the daughter of the King of Gandharvas (celestial elves). A pious Rishi, named Sthula-kesha, found the child and reared her. She was called Pramadarva, and grew to be the most beautiful and most pious of all young women. Ruru, the great grandson of Bhrigu, looked upon her with eyes of love, and at the request of his sire, Pramati, the virgin was betrothed to the young Brahman.

It chanced that Pramadarva was playing with her companions a few days before the morning fixed for the nuptials. As her time had come, she trod upon a serpent, and the death-compelling reptile bit her, whereupon she fell down in a swoon and expired. She became more beautiful in death than she had been in life.

Brahmans assembled round the body of Pramadarva and sorrowed greatly. Ruru stole away alone and went to a solitary place in the forest where he wept aloud. "Alas!" he cried, "the fair one, whom I love more dearly than ever, lieth dead upon the bare ground. If I have performed penances and attained to great ascetic merit, let the power which I have achieved restore my beloved to life again."

Suddenly there appeared before Ruru an emissary from the Celestial regions, who spake and said: "Thy



prayer is of no avail, O Ruru. That one whose days have been numbered can never get back her own life again. Thou shouldst not therefore abandon thine heart to grief. But the gods have decreed a means whereby thou canst receive back thy beloved."

Said Ruru: "Tell me how I can comply with the will of the Celestials, O messenger, so that I may be delivered from my grief."

The messenger said: "If thou wilt resign half of thine own life to this maiden, Pramadvarya, she will rise up again."

Said Ruru: "I will resign half of my own life so that my beloved may be restored unto me."

Then the king of the Gandharvas and the Celestial emissary stood before Dharma-rajah (Yama) and said: "If it be thy will, O Mighty One, let Pramadarva rise up endowed with a part of Ruru's life."

Said the Judge of the Dead: "So be it."

When Dharma-rajah had spoken thus, the serpent-bitten maiden rose from the ground, and Ruru, whose life was curtailed for her sake, obtained the sweetest wife upon earth. The happy pair spent their days deeply devoted to each other, awaiting the call of Yama at the appointed time.<sup>1</sup>

## STORY OF SAVITRI

There was once a fair princess in the country of Madra, and her name was Savitri. Be it told how she obtained the exalted merit of chaste women by winning a great boon from Yama.

Savitri was the gift of the goddess Gayatri,<sup>2</sup> wife of

<sup>1</sup> From *Adi Parva* section of *Mahabharata*.

<sup>2</sup> Saraswati's rival. Brahma took Gayatri, the milkmaid, as a second wife, because his chief wife, Saraswati, despite her wisdom, arrived late for a certain important ceremony, at which the spouse of the god was required.



Brahma, the self-created, who had heard the prayers and received the offerings of Aswapati, the childless king of Madra, when he practised austere penances so that he might have issue. The maiden grew to be beautiful and shapely like to a Celestial; her eyes had burning splendour, and were fair as lotus leaves; she resembled a golden image; she had exceeding sweetness and grace.

It came to pass that Savitri looked with eyes of love upon a youth named Satyavan "the Truthful". Although Satyavan dwelt in a hermitage, he was of royal birth. His father was a virtuous king, named Dyumatsena, who became blind, and was then deprived of his kingdom by an old enemy dwelling nigh to him. The dethroned monarch retired to the forest with his faithful wife and his only son, who in time grew up to be a comely youth.

When Savitri confessed her love to her sire, the great sage Narada, who sat beside him, spoke and said: "Alas! the princess hath done wrong in choosing for her husband this royal youth Satyavan. He is comely and courageous, he is truthful and magnanimous and forgiving, he is modest and patient and without malice; honour is seated upon his forehead; he is possessed of every virtue. But he hath one defect, and no other. He is endued with short life; within a year from this day he must die, for so hath it been decreed; within a year Yama, god of the dead, will come for him."

Said the king unto his daughter: "O Savitri, thou hast heard the words of Narada. Go forth, therefore, and choose for thyself another lord, for the days of Satyavan are numbered."

The beautiful maiden made answer unto her father the king, saying: "The die is cast; it can fall but once; once only can a daughter be given away by her sire; once only can a woman say, '*I am thine*'. I have chosen



my lord; once have I chosen, nor can I make choice a second time. Let his life be brief or be long, I must now wed Satyavan."

Said Narada: "O king, the heart of thy daughter will not waver; she will not be turned aside from the path she hath selected. I therefore approve of the bestowal of Savitri upon Satyavan."

The king said: "As thou dost advise, so must I do ever, O Narada, because that thou art my preceptor. Thee I cannot disobey."

Then said Narada: "Peace be with Savitri! I must now depart. May blessings attend upon all of you!"

Thereafter Aswapati, the royal sire of Savitri, went to visit Dyumatsena, the blind sire of Satyavan, in the forest, and his daughter went with him.

Said Dyumatsena: "Why hast thou come hither?"

Aswapati said: "O royal sage, this is my beautiful daughter Savitri. Take thou her for thy daughter-in-law."

Said Dyumatsena: "I have lost my kingdom, and with my wife and my son dwell here in the woods. We live as ascetics and perform great penances. How will thy daughter endure the hardships of a forest life?"

Aswapati said: "My daughter knoweth well that joy and sorrow come and go and that nowhere is bliss assured. Accept her therefore from me."

Then Dyumatsena consented that his son should wed Savitri, whereat Satyavan was made glad because he was given a wife who had every accomplishment. Savitri rejoiced also because she obtained a husband after her own heart, and she put off her royal garments and ornaments and clad herself in bark and red cloth.

So Savitri became a hermit woman. She honoured Satyavan's father and mother, and she gave great joy to



her husband with her sweet speeches, her skill at work, her subdued and even temper, and especially her love. She lived the life of the ascetics and practised every austerity. But she never forgot the dread prophecy of Narada the sage; his sorrowful words were always present in her secret heart, and she counted the days as they went past.

At length the time drew nigh when Satyavan must cast off his mortal body. When he had but four days to live, Savitri took the *Tritatra* vow of three nights of sleepless penance and fast.

Said the blind Dyumatsena: "My heart is grieved for thee, O my daughter, because the vow is exceedingly hard."

Savitri said: "Be not sorrowful, saintly father, I must observe my vow without fail."

Said Dyumatsena: "It is not meet that one like me should say, 'Break thy vow,' rather should I counsel, 'Observe thy vow.'"

Then Savitri began to fast, and she grew pale and was much wasted by reason of her rigid penance. Three days passed away, and then, believing that her husband would die on the morrow, Savitri spent a night of bitter anguish through all the dark and lonely hours.

The sun rose at length on the fateful morning, and she said to herself, "*To-day is the day.*" Her face was bloodless but brave; she prayed in silence and with fervour and offered oblations at the morning fire; then she stood before her father-in-law and her mother-in-law in reverent silence with joined hands, concentrating her senses. All the hermits of the forest blessed her and said: "Mayest thou never suffer widowhood."

Said Savitri in her secret heart: "So be it."

Dyumatsena spoke to her then, saying: "Now that



thy vow hath been completed thou mayest eat the morning meal."

Said Savitri: "I will eat when the sun goes down."

Hearing her words Satyavan rose, and taking his axe upon his shoulder, turned towards the distant jungle to procure fruits and herbs for his wife, whom he loved. He was strong and self-possessed and of noble seeming.

Savitri spoke to him sweetly and said: "Thou must not go forth alone, my husband. It is my heart's desire to go with thee. I cannot endure to-day to be parted from thee."

Said Satyavan: "It is not for thee to enter the darksome jungle; the way is long and difficult, and thou art weak on account of thy severe penance. How canst thou walk so far on foot?"

Savitri laid her head upon his bosom and said: "I have not been made weary by my fast. Indeed I am now stronger than before. I will not feel tired when thou art by my side. I have resolved to go with thee: do not therefore seek to thwart my wish—the wish and the longing of a faithful wife to be with her lord."

Said Satyavan: "If it is thy desire to accompany me I cannot but gratify it. But thou must ask permission of my parents lest they find fault with me for taking thee through the trackless jungle."

Then Savitri spoke to the blind sage and her husband's mother and said: "Satyavan is going towards the deep jungle to procure fruits and herbs for me, and also fuel for the sacrificial fires. It is my heart's wish to go also, for to-day I cannot endure to be parted from him. Fain, too, would I behold the blossoming woods."

Said Dyumatsena: "Since thou hast come to dwell with us in our hermitage thou hast not before asked



anything of us. Have thy desire therefore in this matter, but do not delay thy husband in his duties."

Having thus received permission to depart from the hermitage, Savitri turned towards the jungle with Satyavan, her beloved lord. Smiles covered her face, but her heart was torn with secret sorrow.

Peacocks fluttered in the green woodland through which they walked together, and the sun shone in all its splendour in the blue heaven.

Said Satyavan with sweet voice: "How beautiful are the bright streams and the blossoming trees!"

The heart of Savitri was divided into two parts: with one she held converse with her husband while she watched his face and followed his moods; with the other she awaited the dread coming of Yama, but she never uttered her fears.

Birds sang sweetly in the forest, but sweeter to Savitri was the voice of her beloved. It was very dear to her to walk on in silence, listening to his words.

Satyavan gathered fruits and stored them in his basket. At length he began to cut down the branches of trees. The sun was hot and he perspired. Suddenly he felt weary and he said: "My head aches; my senses are confused, my limbs have grown weak, and my heart is afflicted sorely. O silent one, a sickness hath seized me. My body seems to be pierced by a hundred darts. I would fain lie down and rest, my beloved; I would fain sleep even now."

Speechless and terror-stricken, the gentle Savitri wound her arms about her husband's body; she sat upon the ground and she pillowed his head upon her lap. Remembering the words of Narada, she knew that the dread hour had come; the very moment of death was at hand. Gently she held her husband's head with



caressing hands; she kissed his panting lips; her heart was beating fast and loud. Darker grew the forest and it was lonesome indeed.

Suddenly an awful Shape emerged from the shadows. He was of great stature and sable hue; his raiment was blood-red; on his head he wore a gleaming diadem; he had red eyes and was fearsome to look upon; he carried a noose. . . . The Shape was Yama, god of death. He stood in silence, and gazed upon slumbering Satyavan.

Savitri looked up, and when she perceived that a Celestial had come nigh, her heart trembled with sorrow and with fear. She laid her husband's head upon the green sward and rose up quickly: then she spake, saying, "Who art thou, O divine One, and what is thy mission to me?"

Said Yama: "Thou dost love thy husband; thou art endued also with ascetic merit. I will therefore hold converse with thee. Know thou that I am the Monarch of Death. The days of this man, thy husband, are now spent, and I have come to bind him and take him away."

Savitri said: "Wise sages have told me that thy messengers carry mortals away. Why, then, O mighty King, hast thou thyself come hither?"

Said Yama: "This prince is of spotless heart; his virtues are without number; he is, indeed, an ocean of accomplishments. It would not be fitting to send messengers for him, so I myself have come hither."

The face of Satyavan had grown ashen pale. Yama cast his noose and tore out from the prince's body the soul-form, which was no larger than a man's thumb; it was tightly bound and subdued.

So Satyavan lost his life; he ceased to breathe; his body became unsightly; it was robbed of its lustre and deprived of power to move.



Yama fettered the soul with tightness, and turned abruptly towards the south; silently and speedily he went upon his way. . . .

Savitri followed him. . . . Her heart was drowned in grief. She could not desert her beloved lord. . . . She followed Yama, the Monarch of Death.

Said Yama: "Turn back, O Savitri. Do not follow me. Perform the funeral rites of thy lord. . . . Thine allegiance to Satyavan hath now come to an end: thou art free from all wifely duties. Dare not to proceed farther on this path."

Savitri said: "I must follow my husband whither he is carried or whither he goeth of his own will. I have undergone great penance. I have observed my vow, and I cannot be turned back. . . . I have already walked with thee seven paces, and the sages have declared that one who walketh seven paces with another becometh a companion. Being thus made thy friend, I must hold converse with thee, I must speak and thou must listen. . . . I have attained the perfect life upon earth by performing my vows and by reason of my devotion unto my lord. It is not meet that thou shouldest part me from my husband now, and prevent me from attaining bliss by saying that my allegiance to him hath ended and another mode of life is opened to me."

Said Yama: "Turn back now. . . . Thy words are wise and pleasing indeed; therefore, ere thou goest, thou canst ask a boon of me and I will grant it. Except the soul of Satyavan, I will give thee whatsoever thou dost desire."

Savitri said: "Because my husband's sire became blind, he was deprived of his kingdom. Restore his eyesight, O mighty One."

Said Yama: "The boon is granted. I will restore the



vision of thy father-in-law. . . . But thou hast now grown faint on this toilsome journey. Turn back, therefore, and thy weariness will pass away."

Savitri said: "How can I be weary when I am with my husband? The fate of my husband will be my fate also; I will follow him even unto the place whither thou dost carry him. . . . Hear me, O mighty One, whose friendship I cherish! It is a blessed thing to behold a Celestial; still more blessed is it to hold converse with one; the friendship of a god must bear great fruit."

Said Yama: "Thy wisdom delighteth my heart. Therefore thou canst ask of me a second boon, except the life of thy husband, and it will be granted thee."

Savitri said: "May my wise and saintly father-in-law regain the kingdom he hath lost. May he become once again the protector of his people."

Said Yama: "The boon is granted. The king will return to his people and be their wise protector. . . . Turn back now, O princess; thy desire is fulfilled."

Savitri said: "All people must obey thy decrees; thou dost take away life in accordance with divine ordinances and not of thine own will. Therefore thou art called Yama—he that ruleth by decrees. Hear my words, O divine One. It is the duty of Celestials to love all creatures and to award them according to their merit. The wicked are without holiness and devotion, but the saintly protect all creatures and show mercy even unto their enemies."

Said Yama: "Thy wise words are like water to a thirsty soul. Ask of me therefore a third boon, except thy husband's life, and it will be granted unto thee."

Savitri said: "My sire, King Aswapati, hath no son. O grant that a hundred sons may be born unto him."

Said Yama: "A hundred sons will be born unto thy





### YAMA AND SAVITRI

*From a painting by Nanda Lal Bose*

(By permission of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta)





royal sire. Thy boon is granted. . . . Turn back, therefore, O princess; thou canst not come farther. Long is the path thou hast already travelled."

Savitri said: "I have followed my husband and the way hath not seemed long. Indeed, my heart desireth to go on much farther. Hear my words, O Yama, as thou dost proceed on thy journey. Thou art great and wise and powerful; thou dost deal equally with all human creatures; thou art the lord of justice. . . . One cannot trust oneself as one can trust a Celestial; therefore, one seeketh to win the friendship of a Celestial. It is meet that one who seeketh the friendship of a Celestial should make answer to his words."

Said Yama: "No mortal hath ever spoken unto me as thou hast spoken. Thy words are indeed pleasing, O princess. I will grant thee even a fourth boon, except thy husband's life, ere thou dost depart."

Savitri said: "May a century of sons be born unto my husband and me so that our race may endure. O grant me this, the fourth boon, thou Mighty One."

Said Yama: "I grant unto thee a century of sons, O princess; they will be wise and powerful and thy race will endure. . . . Be without weariness now, O lady, and turn back; thou hast come too far already."

Savitri said: "Those who are pious must practise eternal morality, O Yama. The pious uphold the universe. The pious hold communion with the pious only, and are never weary; the pious do good unto others nor ever expect any reward. A good deed done unto the righteous is never thrown away; such an act doth not entail loss of dignity nor is any interest impaired. Indeed, the doing of good is the chief office of the righteous, and the righteous therefore are the true protectors of all."



Said Yama: "The more thou dost speak, the more I respect thee, O princess. O thou who art so deeply devoted unto thy husband, thou canst now ask of me some incomparable boon."

Savitri said: "O mighty One, thou bestower of boons, thou hast already promised what cannot be fulfilled unless my husband is restored unto me; thou hast promised me a century of sons. Therefore, I ask thee, O Yama, to give me back Satyavan, my beloved, my lord. Without him, I am as one who is dead; without him, I have no desire for happiness; without him I have no longing even for Heaven; I will have no desire to prosper if my lord is snatched off; I cannot live without Satyavan. Thou hast promised me sons, O Yama, yet thou dost take away my husband from mine arms. Hear me and grant this boon: Let Satyavan be restored to life so that thy decree may be fulfilled."

Said Yama: "So be it. With cheerful heart I now unbind thy husband. He is free. . . . Disease cannot afflict him again and he will prosper. Together you will both have long life; you will live four hundred years; you will have a century of sons and they will be kings, and their sons will be kings also."

Having spoken thus, Yama, the lord of death, departed unto his own place. And Savitri returned to the forest where her husband's body lay cold and ashen-pale; she sat upon the ground and pillowed his head upon her lap. Then Satyavan was given back his life. . . . He looked upon Savitri with eyes of love; he was like to one who had returned from a long journey in a strange land.

Said Satyavan: "Long was my sleep; why didst thou not awaken me, my beloved? . . . Where is that dark One who dragged me away?"



Savitri said: "Yama hath come and gone, and thou hast slept long, resting thy head upon my lap, and art now refreshed, O blessed one. Sleep hath forsaken thee, O son of a king. If thou canst rise up, let us now depart hence for the night is already dark. . . ."

Satyavan rose up refreshed and strong. He looked round about and perceived that he was in the midst of the forest. Then he said: "O fair one, I came hither to gather fruit for thee, and while I cut down branches from the trees a pain afflicted me. I grew faint, I sank upon the ground, I laid my head upon thy lap and fell into a deep slumber even whilst thou didst embrace me. Then it seemed to me that I was enveloped in darkness, and that I beheld a sable One amidst great effulgence. . . . Was this a vision or a reality, O fairest and dearest?"

Savitri said: "The darkness deepens. . . . I will tell thee all on the morrow. . . . Let us now find our parents, O prince. The beasts of the night come forth; I hear their awesome voices; they tread the forest in glee; the howl of the jackal maketh my heart afraid."<sup>1</sup>

Said Satyavan: "Darkness hath covered the forest with fear; we cannot discover the path by which to return home."

Savitri said: "A withered tree burneth yonder. I will gather sticks and make a fire and we will wait here until day."

Said Satyavan: "My sickness hath departed and I would fain behold my parents again. Never before have I spent a night away from the hermitage. My mother is old and my father also, and I am their crutch. They will now be afflicted with sorrow because that we have not returned."

<sup>1</sup> Unfaithful wives were transformed into jackals after death.



Satyavan lifted up his arms and lamented aloud, but Savitri dried his tears and said: "I have performed penances, I have given away in charity, I have offered up sacrifices, I have never uttered a falsehood. May thy parents be protected by virtue of the power which I have obtained, and may thou, O my husband, be protected also."

Said Satyavan: "O beautiful one, let us now return to the hermitage."

Savitri raised up her despairing husband. She then placed his left arm upon her left shoulder and wound her right arm about his body, and they walked on together. . . . At length the fair moon came out and shone upon their path.

Meanwhile Dyumatsena, the sire of Satyavan, had regained his sight, and he went with his wife to search for his lost son, but had to return to the hermitage sorrowing and in despair. The sages comforted the weeping parents and said: "Savitri hath practised great austerities, and there can be no doubt that Satyavan is still alive."

In time Satyavan and Savitri reached the hermitage, and their own hearts and the hearts of their parents were freed from sorrow.

Then Savitri related all that had taken place, and the sages said: "O chaste and illustrious lady, thou hast rescued the race of Dyumatsena, the foremost of kings, from the ocean of darkness and calamity."

On the morning that followed messengers came to Dyumatsena and told that the monarch who had deprived him of his kingdom was dead, having fallen by the hand of his chief minister. All the people clamoured for their legitimate ruler. Said the messengers: "Chariots await thee, O king. Return, therefore, unto thy kingdom."



Great was their wonder to find that Dyumatsena was no longer blind.

So the king was restored to his kingdom, in accordance with the boon which Savitri had obtained from Yama. And sons were in time born unto her father. Thus did the gentle Savitri, by reason of her great piety, raise from misery to high fortune the family of her husband and her own father also. She was the rescuer of all; the bringer of happiness and prosperity. . . . He who heareth the story of Savitri will never endure misery again. . . .

The beauties of Yama's heaven are sung by the sage Narada in the great epic poem *Mahabharata*.<sup>1</sup> "Listen to me," he says. "In that fair domain it is neither too hot nor too cold. Life there is devoid of sorrow; age does not bring frailties, and none ever hunger or thirst; it is without wretchedness, or fatigue, or evil feelings. Everything, whether celestial or human, that the heart seeks after is found there. Sweet are the juicy fruits, delicious the fragrance of flowers and tree blossoms, and waters are there, both cold and hot, to give refreshment and comfort. Nymphs dance and sing to the piping of celestial elves, and merry laughter ever blends with the strains of alluring music.

"The Assembly House of Yama, which was made by Twashtri, hath splendour equal to the sun; it shines like burnished gold. There the servants of the Lord of Justice measure out the allotted days of mortals. Great rishis and ancestors await upon Yama, King of the Pitris (fathers), and adore him. Sanctified by holiness, their shining bodies are clad in swan-white garments, and decked with many-coloured bracelets and golden earrings. Sweet sounds, alluring perfumes, and brilliant

<sup>1</sup> *Lokapala-Sabhakhyana* section of *Sabha Parva*.



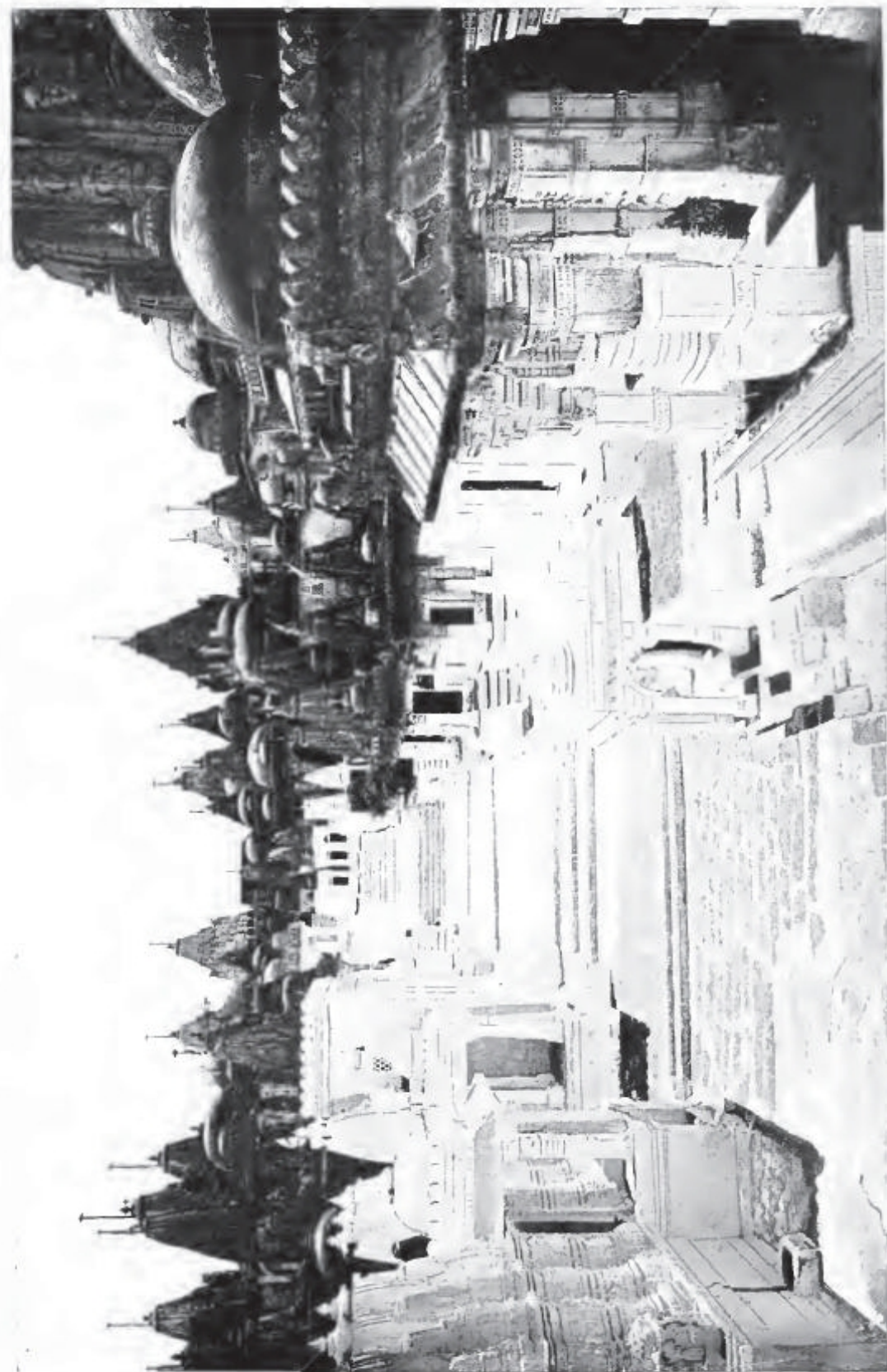
flower garlands make that building ever pleasant and supremely blest. Hundreds of thousands of saintly beings worship the illustrious King of the Pitris.

"The heaven of Indra was constructed by the great artisan-god himself. Like a chariot it can be moved anywhere at will. The Assembly House has many rooms and seats, and is adorned by celestial trees. Indra sits there with his beautiful queen, wearing his crown, with gleaming bracelets on his upper arms; he is decked with flowers, and attired in white garments. He is waited upon by brilliant Maruts, and all the gods and the rishis and saints, whose sins have been washed off their pure souls, which are resplendent as fire. There is no sorrow, or fear, or suffering in Indra's abode, which is inhabited by the spirits of wind and thunder, fire and water, plants and clouds, and planets and stars, and the spirits also of Prosperity, Religion, Joy, Faith, and Intelligence. Fairies and elves (Apsaras and Gandharvas) dance and sing there to sweet music; feats of skill are performed by celestial battle heroes, auspicious rites are also practised. Divine messengers come and go in celestial chariots, looking bright as Soma himself.

"The heaven of Varuna was constructed by Vishwakarma (Twashti) within the sea. Its walls and arches are of pure white, and they are surrounded by celestial trees, made of sparkling jewels, which always blossom and always bear fruit. In the many-coloured bowers beautiful and variegated birds sing delightful melodies. In the Assembly House, which is also of pure white, there are many rooms and many seats. Varuna, richly decked with jewels and golden ornaments and flowers, is throned there with his queen. Adityas<sup>1</sup> wait upon the

<sup>1</sup> Sons of the goddess Aditi. They are attendants of Varuna, their chief, as the Maruts are attendants of Indra.





THE CITY OF THE GODS, PALITANA





lord of the waters, as also do hooded snakes (Nagas) with human heads and arms, and Daityas and Danavas (giants and demons) who have taken vows and have been rewarded with immortality. All the holy spirits of rivers and oceans are there, and the holy spirits of lakes and springs and pools, and the personified forms of the points of the heavens, the ends of the earth, and the great mountains. Music and dances provide entertainment, while sacred hymns are sung in praise of Varuna."

These heavens recall the Grecian "Islands of the Blest" and the Celtic Otherworld, where eternal summer reigns, trees bear blossoms and fruit continually, and there is no wasting with age. Indra's Assembly House is slightly reminiscent of the Teutonic Valhal, but is really more like the gardens of the underworld Hela. The Indian heroes do not feast on pork like those of Teutonic and Celtic myth; in the Assembly House of Kuvera, god of wealth, however, fat and flesh are eaten by fierce sentinel dwarfs. The fairy-like Apsaras are wooed by Indra's favoured warriors as well as by the gods.

One of the conditions which secured entry to the heaven of Yama was that a man should have offspring. A rishi, named Mandapala, devoted himself to religious vows and the observance of great austerities, but when he reached the region of the Pitris, he could not obtain "the fruit of his acts". He asked: "Why is this domain unattainable to me?"

Said the Celestials: "Because thou hast no children. . . . The Vedas have declared that the son rescueth the father from a hell called Put. O best of Brahmans, strive thou to beget offspring."<sup>1</sup>

A father could only reach Heaven if his son, after performing the cremation ceremony, poured forth the

<sup>1</sup> *Adi Parva* section of *Mahabharata*, Roy's trans., p. 635.

oblation and performed other necessary services to the dead. Consequently, all men showed great anxiety to have sons. In the Vedic period the exposure of female children was not unknown; indeed, this practice is referred to in the *Yajurveda*. "It is sorrowful to have a daughter," exclaims the writer of one of the *Brahmanas*.

One reason for infanticide in modern India is associated with the practice of exogamy (marriage outside of one's tribe). Raids took place for the purpose of obtaining wives and these were invariably the cause of much bloodshed. In 1842 members of the Kandhs tribe told Major Macpherson "that it was better to destroy girls in their infancy than to allow them to grow up and become causes of strife afterwards". Colonel MacCulloch, Political Agent for Manipur, stamped out infanticide in the Naga country by assuring the people of a tribe that they would be protected against the wife-hunting parties of a stronger tribe. "Many years afterwards a troop of Naga girls from the weaker tribe paid a visit of ceremony to Colonel MacCulloch, bearing presents of cloth of their own weaving in token of their gratitude to the man who had saved their lives."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Tribes and Castes of Bengal. H. H. Risley (1892), vol. i, lxx, *et seq.*



## CHAPTER IV

### Demons and Giants and Fairies

Indian Asuras as Demons—Persian Ahura a God—Indian Gods as Persian Demons—Theory of Assyrian Influence—Indra's Battle with Asuras—Like Thor's Conflict with Giants—The Sun and Moon Devourer—Giants and Demons of Ocean—The Flying City—Destruction of World by Fire—Teutonic Parallel—Serpent Demigods—Man's Special Enemies—The Corpse Eaters—Demons of Disease, Unbelief, and Robbery—Elves and Fairies—The "Good People"—Celestial Musicians and Dancing Girls—Origin of Mythical Beings—Story of a Love-sick King—His Fairy Bride—The Echoing Forest Nymph—The "Language of Birds"—Birds as Spirits and Ghosts.

THE gods are the Suras and the demons the Asuras or "non-gods". This distinction, however, did not obtain in the early Vedic period. Originally the deities, and especially Varuna and Mitra, were called Asuras, but in the later part of the *Rigveda* the term is applied chiefly to the enemies of the gods. In the *Atharvaveda*, as in subsequent Epic literature, the Asuras are simply demons and giants and goblins.

No conclusive explanation can be offered as to how this remarkable change took place in the course of the centuries embraced by the Vedic period. It may have been due primarily to sectarian strife between the religious teachers of those tribes which had been influenced by Babylonian modes of thought and those which clung tenaciously to the forms of primitive Aryan nature worship, and perhaps also the worship of ancestors (Pitris). In the old Persian language, which, like Greek, places



“h” before a vowel where “s” is used in Sanskrit, Ahura (= Asura) signifies “god”. The Zoroastrian chief god is called Ahura-Mazda, “the wise Lord”, as Varuna is addressed in early Rigvedic hymns, “wise Asura and King”, and “the all-knowing Asura who established the heavens and fixed the limits of the earth”. On the other hand “daeva” in the Iranian dialect, which is cognate with Sanskrit “deva”, “god”, came to mean “demon”. “Asura” is derived from the root “asu”, which signifies “the air of life”, and “deva” from “div”, “to shine”, or “deiwo”, “heavenly”.

The view has been urged that the revolt against “Asura” in India was due to the hatred cherished towards the Persians who had become subject to the Assyrians, the worshippers of Ashur. It was originally based on the assumption that Assyrian aggression caused the migration of Aryan tribes towards India. Subsequent research, however, has tended to dispel this theory. It has been found, for instance, that Aryans were associated with the Kassites who overthrew the Hammurabi dynasty of Babylon prior to the invasion of the Punjab, and that the Assyrians were for a period vassals of the Mitanni kings, who had Aryan names and worshipped Indra, Varuna, and Mithra in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. The weak point in the Ashur-Asura theory is that it throws no light on the process which caused the Persian “daeva” to be applied to demons instead of to gods. How the gods of the Indian Aryans became the demons of Persia and the demons of Persia became the gods of India is a problem for which a solution has yet to be found.

The expository and speculative books of the priests—the *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads*—which are attached to the Vedic hymns, do not help us greatly in accounting for



the change. We read that "the gods and Asuras contended together, and that the former, being less numerous than the latter, took some bricks, and placing them in a proper position to receive the sacrificial fire, with the formula, 'Thou art a multiplier', they became numerous".<sup>1</sup>

In one of the Brahmanas we are informed:

"The Asuras performed at the sacrifice all that the Devas performed. The Asuras became thus of equal power with the Devas, and did not yet yield to them. Thereupon the Devas had a vision of the 'silent praise'. The Asuras, not knowing it, did not perform the 'silent praise'. This 'silent praise' is the latent essence of the hymns. Till then, whatever weapons the Devas used against the Asuras, the Asuras used in revenge against them; but when the Devas had a vision of the 'silent praise' and raised it as a weapon, the Asuras did not comprehend it. With it the Devas aimed a blow at the Asuras, and defeated them, for they had no comprehension of this weapon. Thereupon the Devas became masters of the Asuras. He who has such a knowledge becomes master of his enemy, adversary, and hater."<sup>2</sup>

This explanation is but an echo of the Indra-Vritra combat. Another statement is to the effect that "the Devas gave up falsehood and adopted truth, while the Asuras gave up truth and adopted falsehood". Further, we learn that when a sacrifice was performed the Asuras put the offerings into their own mouths, while the Suras (gods) gave the offerings they received to one another.

The Asuras became completely identified with the demons and giants; they symbolized evil, darkness, and drought. In Epic literature we read that "in ancient times the gods and Asuras were very active in destroying one another. And the terrible Asuras always succeeded in defeating the gods." . . . Indra goes forth with

<sup>1</sup> Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, v, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Professor E. Vernon Arnold's *The Rigveda*, p. 54.



his thunderbolt against Kesi, the leader of the Asuras, who wielded a great mace; this mace the demon hurled against the god, but Indra "cut it up in its course with his thunderbolt. Then Kesi, furious with rage, hurled a huge mass of rock at him." Indra "of a hundred sacrifices rent it asunder with his thunderbolt, and it fell down upon the ground. And Kesi himself was wounded by that falling mass of rock.<sup>1</sup> Thus sorely afflicted he fled". Indra rescues a beautiful lady who had been seized by the Asura, and she informs the god that her sister had previously fallen a victim to the demon. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The Asuras obstructed sacrifices; they were ever hovering round altars to discover if rites were properly performed; if a priest did not perform a ceremony in orthodox fashion, the sacrifice was of no avail, because the Asuras devoured it; if a man neglected a part of a ceremonial performance, a demon might take possession of him and accomplish his ruin.

One of the terrible Asuras is the demon Rahu, who causes eclipses by swallowing the sun and the moon, like the Chinese dragon, the wolf Managarm of Teutonic mythology, and the Grecian demons who devour Helena, the sun maiden, sister of the twin Dioscuri. In the Vedic period Rahu was represented by the demon Svarbhanu.

The Asuras of Ocean are the Daityas and Danavas, the descendants of the chaos hags Diti and Danu, and Kasyapa, a superhuman sage. These are the giants and demons who fought against the gods like the Titans, the Irish Fomorians, and the Norse Jotuns. Indra confined them in this region, which is called Patala, and they re-

<sup>1</sup> In the combat between Thor and the giant Hrungner, the thunder-hammer similarly cleaves a mass of flint hurled by the enemy.—*Teutonic Myth and Legend*.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahabharata*, *Vana Parva* section, pp. 679-80, Roy's trans.





DURGA SLAYING GIANTS AND DEMONS

*From a sculpture at Minallapuram*





main there "afflicted by Time",<sup>1</sup> and subject to the sway of Varuna. Like the Norse giants, they will be let loose to take part in the "Last Battle". An "Asura fire" burns constantly in Patala, fed by water; it is "bound and confined", but cannot be extinguished; when the end of all comes, it will burst forth and burn up the three worlds.<sup>2</sup> In Teutonic mythology the Universe is similarly doomed to be consumed by fire at Ragnarok, "the Dusk of the Gods".

The abodes of these giants and demons are exceedingly beautiful; they are agleam with gold and precious stones; seats and beds are provided in the mansions, and there are also recreation grounds, and forests and mountains resembling clouds. Indeed, the Daityas and Danavas live pretty much in the same manner as the gods, for "the gods and Danavas are brothers, although ever hostile to one another".<sup>3</sup> The Danava women are of gigantic stature, and wear jewels as large as mountain boulders; when terrified by the attacks of the gods, they "bewail like unto cranes in Autumn". One of the Daitya tribes reside in the moving city named Hiranyapura, which they constructed for their protection; sometimes it sinks below the sea, or under the earth; at other times it soars across the heavens like the sun. Indra, as we have seen, has a similar aerial city.

In the Underworld dwell also the Nagas, the demoniac Cobras; they are of human form to the waist, the rest of their bodies being like those of serpents. Their king is Shesha, who is also named Vasuki and Karkotaka; he is sometimes represented with a thousand heads, and resembles Typhon, who fought with Zeus. In the *Ramayana* he is Ravana, the Demon of Ceylon. The

<sup>1</sup> "Overwhelmed by misfortune" (Roy).

<sup>2</sup> Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld.

<sup>3</sup> *Mahabharata*.



prototypes of Shesha and his hosts are the dragons Vritra, "the encompasser"; Ahi, "the confiner"; and fierce Kushna, "the scorcher", who spits out the sunset fires and burns up day.

When serpent worship became prevalent among the Aryans, the Nagas were regarded as demigods. They were occasionally "the friends of man", and to those they favoured they gave draughts of their nectar, which endowed them with great strength. Their city was the Paradise of serpent worshippers. The female Nagas were beautiful nymphs, who were sometimes wooed by mortals.

As the Asuras are the enemies of the gods, the Rakshas or Rakshasas are the enemies of man.<sup>1</sup> These demons are "night prowlers"; they have greatest power after "the first forty seconds of grey twilight preceding nightfall". They travel faster than the wind, and go through the air; they have also power to change their shape. Sometimes they appear in the guise of tigers, bears, or great monkeys; and their hues vary from yellow to red, and blue to green. In the *Ramayana* they are found associated with the Asuras of Ceylon; a spy enters a demon dwelling and sees them in all their shapes, some frightfully deformed, with small bodies and long arms; some as grotesque dwarfs, others as horrible giants with long projecting teeth; some with one eye, others with three eyes; some with one leg, two legs, or three, or even four; and some with heads of serpents, horses, or elephants. In the *Mahabharata* the Rakshasas are like gorillas; they have arrow-shaped ears, big red eyes, and red hair and beards, and mouths like caves; they feast on human beings and cattle. The heroic Bhima, like Siegfried Dietrich of Bern, Beowulf, and Finn-mac-Coul,

<sup>1</sup> Asuras are sometimes called Rakshasas also.



is a mighty slayer of these man-eating demons. They are impervious to weapons, but Bhima wrestles with them and breaks their backs or tears them asunder, after lively combats with trees and boulders. Female Rakshasas sometimes fall in love with human beings, and transform themselves into beautiful women. Bhima takes one for his bride, and she carries him through the air to a Celestial retreat among the mountains.

The most loathsome Rakshasas are the goblin-like Pisachas,<sup>1</sup> who are devourers of dead bodies in cemeteries, and are exceedingly vile and malignant fiends. They are the bringers of diseases and wasting fevers. In the *Atharvaveda* Agni is invoked by the priests, who mutter charms over suffering and "possessed" mortals, to take the Pisachas between his teeth and devour them. They are "those who hound us in our chambers, while shouting goes on in the night of the new moon . . . the flesh devourers, who plan to injure us, and whom I overcome". The priest declares: "I plague the Pisachas as the tiger the cattle owners. As dogs who have seen a lion, these do not find a refuge. . . . From villages I enter Pisachas fly away. . . . May Nirriti (a goddess of destruction) take hold of this one."<sup>2</sup>

Kali, a demon who holds friendly converse with the gods in the "Story of Nala", is attended by Dwápara, a flesh-eater like the Pisachas. The Panis are aerial demons, who are hated by bluff, honest Indra, because they are the inspirers of foolish actions, slander, and unbelief, and the imps who encourage men to neglect homage to deities. The black Dasyus are repulsive of aspect and jealous-hearted; they are the stealers of the cloud cows who are held captive for Vritra in the cave

<sup>1</sup> *Pron.* pe-shatch'as.

<sup>2</sup> Bloomfield's *Atharvaveda*, iv, 36 (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlii).



of the demon Vala. The Darbas, "the tearers", are a variety of Pisachas. Reference is made in *Mahabharata* to "ugly Vartikas of dreadful sight, having one wing, one eye, and one leg"; when they "vomit blood, facing the sun", a dreadful happening is known to be at hand, because they are fiends of evil omen.

Among the supernatural beings who are sometimes the enemies, but in most cases the friends of mankind, are the Yakshas, the Gandharvas, and the Apsaras (Apsarasas).

The Yakshas are occasionally referred to as the Punyajanas, "the good people"; they may be of human stature, with big benevolent eyes, or powerful giants who can fight as fiercely as Rakshasas. They are guardians of hidden treasure, like the dwarfs and giants of Teutonic legend, being associated with Kuvera, god of wealth, whose abode is situated among the Himalayan mountains. In Kuvera's domain are found "multitudes of spirits" who do not visit the world of men as a rule, but remain near the treasure for purposes of defence; "some are of dwarfish stature, some of fierce visage, some hunchbacked, some of blood-red eyes, some of frightful yells; some are feeding upon fat and flesh, and some are terrible to behold; and all are armed with various weapons, and endued with the speed of the wind".<sup>1</sup>

The Gandharvas are grouped in tribes, and number over six thousand individuals. They are all of the male sex. They haunt the air, the forests, and the mountains, and, like the Rakshasas, have power to work illusions in the grey twilight before nightfall. References are made in the Epics to their combats with human beings. To warriors who overcome them they impart instruction in religious matters; those whom they conquer they carry

<sup>1</sup> *Mahabharata*, Roy's trans. (*Sabha Parva*, p. 32).





THE CELESTIAL FAIRIES (APSARAS)

*Sculpture on a modern Hindu Temple, Benares*





away, like the Teutonic elves and dwarfs. The Gandharvas are renowned musicians and bards and singers. When they play on their divine instruments the fairy-like Apsaras, who are all females, dance merrily. In the various Aryan heavens these elves and fairies delight and allure with music and song and dance the gods, and the souls of those who have attained to a state of bliss. The Apsara dancing girls are "voluptuous and beautiful", and inspire love in Paradise as well as upon earth. Their lovers include gods, Gandharvas, and mortals. Arjuna, the human son of Indra, who was transported in a Celestial chariot to Swarga over Suravithi, "the Milky Way", was enchanted by the music and songs and dances of the Celestial elves and fairies. He followed bands of Gandharvas who were "skilled in music sacred and profane", and he saw the bewitching Apsaras, including the notorious Menaka, "with eyes like lotus blooms, employed in enticing hearts"; they had "fair round hips and slim waists", and "began to perform various evolutions, shaking their deep bosoms and casting their glances around, and exhibiting other attractive attitudes capable of stealing the hearts and resolutions and minds of the spectators".<sup>1</sup>

In the *Rigveda* there is a water-nymph, named Apsaras; she is the "spouse" of Gandharva, an atmospheric deity who prepares Soma for the gods and reveals divine truths to mortals. They vanish, however, in later times; the other Vedas deal with the spirit groups which figure so prominently in the Epics. No doubt the groups are older than Gandharva, the god, and Apsaras, the goddess, who may be simply the elf-king and the fairy-queen. The "black" Dasyus are sometimes referred to by modern-day writers as the dark aborigines who were displaced by the

<sup>1</sup> *Vana Parva* section of *Mahabharata*.



Aryans; a tribal significance is also given to the Rakshasas and the Gandharvas. But this tendency to identify the creatures of the spirit world with human beings may be carried too far. If "Dasyus" were really "dark folk",<sup>1</sup> it should be remembered that in Teutonic mythology there are "black dwarfs", who live in underground dwellings, and "white elves" associated with air and ocean; there are also black and white fairies in the Scottish Highlands, so that black and white spirits may simply belong to night and day spirit groups. It may be that the Indian aborigines were referred to contemptuously as Dasyus by the Aryans. The application of the names of repulsive imps to human enemies is not an unfamiliar habit even in our own day; in China the European is a "foreign devil", but Chinese "devils" existed long before Europeans secured a footing in the Celestial Kingdom. Those who seek for a rational explanation for the belief in the existence of mythical beings should remember that primitive man required no models for the creatures of his fancy. He symbolized everything—his ideals, his desires, his hopes and his fears, the howling wind, the low whispering breeze, the creaking tree, the torrent, the river, the lake, and the mountain; he heard the hammer or the trumpet of a mighty god in the thunderstorm, he believed that giants uprooted trees and cast boulders down mountain slopes, that demons raised ocean billows in tempest, and that the strife of the elements was a war between gods and giants; day and night, ever in conflict, were symbolized, as were also summer and winter, and growth and decay. If the fairies and elves of Europe are Lapps, or the small men of an interglacial period

<sup>1</sup> Dasyu and Dasa are "applied in many passages of the *Rigveda* to superhuman enemies". The colour reference in Dasa is probable, but it is also used in other senses. For a full discussion on conflicting views regarding Dasyu and Dasa see *Pedic Index of Names and Subjects*. Macdonell and Keith, vol. i, pp. 347-9 and 356-8.



in the Pleistocene Age, and if the Dasyus and Gandharvas of India are merely Dravidians and pre-Dravidians who resisted the Aryan invasion, who, then, it may be asked, were the prototypes of the giants "big as mountains", or the demons like "trees walking", the "tiger-headed" Rakshasas, "ugly Vartikas" with "one wing, one eye, and one leg"? and what animal suggested Vritra, or the fiery dragon that burned up daylight, or Rahu, the swallower of sun and moon? If the redhaired and red-bearded Rakshasas are to be given a racial significance, what of the blue Rakshasas and the green? The idea that primitive man conceived of giants because he occasionally unearthed the bones of prehistoric monsters, is certainly not supported by Scottish evidence; Scotland swarms with giants and hags of mountain, ocean, and river, although it has not yielded any great skeletons or even a single artifact of the Palæolithic Age. Giants and fairies are creations of fancy. Just as a highly imaginative child symbolizes his fears and peoples darkness with terrifying monsters, so, it may be inferred, did primitive man who crouched in his cave, or spent sleepless nights in tempest-stricken forests, conceive with childlike mind of demons thirsting for his blood and giants of wind and fire intent on destroying the Universe.

In India, as elsewhere, the folk of the spirit world might woo or be wooed by impressionable mortals. A Gandharva related to Arjuna, the Pandava prince, by whom he was defeated in single combat, the "charming story", as he called it, of King Samvarana and the fairy-like Tapati, a daughter of the sun god, Surya. Tapati was of all nymphs the most beautiful; she was "perfectly symmetrical" and "exquisitely attired"; she had "faultless features, and black, large eyes"; and, in contrast to an Apsara, she "was chaste and exceedingly well con-



ducted". For a time the sun god considered that no husband could be found who was worthy of his daughter; and therefore "knew no peace of mind, always thinking of the person he should select". One day, however, King Samvarana worshipped the sun, and made offerings of flowers and sweet perfumes, and Surya resolved to bestow his daughter upon this ideal man.

It came to pass that Samvarana went a-hunting deer on the mountains. He rode swiftly in pursuit of a nimble-footed stag, leaving his companions behind, until his steed expired with exhaustion. Then he wandered about alone. In a secluded wood he beheld a maiden of exquisite beauty; he gazed at her steadfastly for a time, thinking she was a goddess or "the embodiment of the rays emanating from the sun". Her body was as radiant as fire and as spotless as the crescent moon; she stood motionless like to a golden statue. The flowers and the creepers round about partook of her beauty, and "seemed to be converted into gold". She was Tapati, daughter of the sun.

The king's eyes were captivated, his heart was wounded by the arrows of the love god Kama; he lost his peace of mind. At length he spoke and said: "Who art thou, O fair one? O maiden of sweet smiles, why dost thou linger in these lonely woods? I have never seen or heard of one so beautiful as thee. . . . The love god tortures me."

That lotus-eyed maiden made no answer; she vanished from sight like to lightning in the clouds.

The king hastened through the forest, lamenting for her: he searched in vain; he stood motionless in grief; he fell down on the earth and swooned.

Then, smiling sweetly, the maiden appeared again. In honeyed words she spoke, saying: "Arise, thou tiger



among kings. It is not meet that thou shouldst lose thy reason in this manner."

Samvarana opened his eyes and beheld Tapati. Weak with emotion he spoke and said: "I am burning with love for thee, thou black-eyed beauty, O accept me. My life is ebbing away. . . . I have been bitten by Kama, who is even like a venomous snake. Have mercy on me. . . . O thou of handsome and faultless features, O thou of face like unto the lotus or the moon, O thou of voice sweet as that of singing Kinnaras, my life now depends on thee. Without thee, O timid one, I am unable to live. It behoveth thee not, O black-eyed maid, to cast me off; it behoveth thee to relieve me from this affliction by giving me thy love. At the first sight thou hast distracted my heart. My mind wandereth. Be merciful; I am thy obedient slave, thy adorer. O accept me. . . . O thou of lotus eyes, the flame of desire burneth within me. O extinguish that flame by throwing on it the water of thy love. . . . " <sup>1</sup>

Tapati replied: "I am not mistress of mine own self. I am a maiden ruled by my father. If thou dost love me, demand me of him. My heart hath been robbed by thee."

Then, revealing her identity, Tapati ascended to heaven, and once again Samvarana fell upon the earth and swooned.

The ministers and followers of the king came searching for him, and found him "lying forsaken on the ground like a rainbow dropped from the firmament". They sprinkled his face with cool and lotus-scented water. When he revived, the monarch sent away all his followers except one minister. For twelve days he worshipped the sun constantly on the mountain top. Then a great

<sup>1</sup> *Mahabharata*, Roy's translation (*Adi Parva*, section, pp. 495-6).



Rishi, whom he had sent for, came to him, and the Rishi ascended to the sun. Ere long he returned with Tapati, the sun god having declared that Samvarana would be a worthy husband for his daughter.

For twelve years the king lived with his fairy bride in the mountain forests, and a regent ruled over the kingdom.

But although the monarch enjoyed great bliss, living the life of a Celestial, the people of the kingdom suffered greatly. For twelve years no rain fell, "not even a drop of dew came from the skies, and no corn was grown". The people were afflicted with famine; men grew reckless, and deserted their wives and children; the capital became like to a city of the dead.

Then a great Rishi brought Samvarana back to his capital with his Celestial bride. And after that things became as they were before. Rain fell in abundance and corn was grown. "Revived by that foremost of monarchs of virtuous soul, the capital and the country became glad with exceeding joy."<sup>1</sup> A son was born to the king, and his name was Kuru.

There are many other uncatalogued Celestial beings like Tapati in Indian fairyland. In the *Atharva-veda* there are numerous named and nameless spirits of good and evil, and throughout the Epics references are made to semi-divine beings who haunt streams, lakes, forests, and plains. A *Rigveda* hymn is addressed to the forest nymph Aranyani. She echoes the voices of man and beast and creates illusions:

She mimics kine that crop the grass,  
She rumbles like a cart at even,

<sup>1</sup> Like an Egyptian Pharaoh, the rajah is here a god among men. His presence was necessary to ensure the success of rain-bringing ceremonies.



She calls a cow, she hews down wood,  
The man who lingers says, "Who calleth?"

O Aranyani will not harm  
If one will not invade her dwelling,  
When, having eaten luscious fruit,  
At her sweet will she turns to slumber.

The singing birds are all singing spirits in India as in Europe. The "language of birds" is the language of spirits. When Siegfried, after eating of the dragon's heart, understood the "language of birds", he heard them warning him regarding his enemies. Our seafarers whistle when they invoke the spirit of the wind. Sir Walter Scott drew attention, in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, to the belief that the speech of spirits was a kind of whistling. As we have seen, the wives of Danavas had voices like Cranes; Homer's ghosts twittered like bats; Egyptian ghosts were hooting owls. In India the croaking raven is still a bird of evil omen, as it is also in the West. In the Scottish Highlands the spirits of the dead sometimes appear as birds; so do fairies. The Irish gods and the Celestial Rishis of India take the form of swans, like the "swan maidens", when they visit mankind. In the Assyrian legend of Ishtar the souls of the dead in Hades "are like birds covered with feathers". Numerous instances could be quoted to illustrate the widespread association of birds with the spirit world.

## CHAPTER V

# Social and Religious Developments of the Vedic Age

Aryan Civilization—Tribes and Clans—Villages and Trade—Divisions of Society—Origin of Castes—Rise of the Priestly Cult—Brahmanic Ideals of Life—Brahmanic Students—The Source of Algebra—Samaveda and Yajurveda—Atharva-veda Charms and Invocations—The “Middle Country” the Centre of Brahmanic Culture—Sacred Prose Books—Bold Pantheism of the Upanishads—Human Sacrifice and its Symbolism—Chaos Giant Myth in India, Babylonia, and China, and in Teutonic Mythology—Horse Sacrifices in India, Siberia, Greece, Rome, &c.—Creation the Result of Sacrifice—Death as the Creator and Devourer.

DURING the Vedic Age, which came to a close in the eighth century B.C., the Aryan settlers spread gradually eastward and southward. At first they occupied the Punjab, but ere the Rigvedic period was ended they had reached the banks of the Jumna and the Ganges in the “Middle Country”. In the early hymns the great Himalayan mountains dominate fertile river valleys, but the greater part of northern India is covered by vast and dense forests. No mention is made of the sea.

The Aryans were a pastoral and hunting people, with some knowledge of agriculture. They possessed large herds of cattle, and had also sheep, goats, and asses; they were, besides, famous breeders and tamers of horses; the faithful dog, man's earliest friend, followed both herdsman and hunter. The plough was in use, and bullocks were yoked to it; grain was thrashed in primitive manner



and ground between "pounding stones". Barley and wheaten cakes, milk, curds, butter, and cheese, and wild fruits were the chief articles of diet; the products of the chase were also eaten, but there appears to have been at the earliest period a restriction in the consumption of certain foods. Beef was not eaten at meals. Bulls were sacrificed to the gods. Two kinds of intoxicating liquors were brewed—the mysterious Soma, beloved by deities, and a mead or ale called "sura", the Avestan "hura", prepared probably from grain, which had ever an evil reputation as a cause of peace-breaking, like dice, and of wrongdoing generally.

Metals were in use, for the earliest Aryan invasion took place in the Bronze Age, during which there were great race movements and invasions and conquests in Asia and in Europe. It is doubtful whether or not iron was known by the earliest Aryan settlers in India; it was probably not worked, but may have been utilized for charms, as in those countries in which meteoric iron was called "the metal of heaven". The knowledge of the mechanical arts had advanced beyond the primitive stage. Warriors fought not only on foot but also in chariots, and they wore breastplates; their chief weapons were bows and horn or metal-tipped arrows, maces, battleaxes, swords, and spears. Smiths roused their fires with feather fans; carpenters are mentioned in the hymns, and even barbers who used razors.

The father was the head of the family, and the family was the tribal unit. War was waged by a loose federation of small clans, each of which was distinguished by the name of a patriarch. The necessity of having to conduct frequent campaigns in a new country, peopled by hostile aliens, no doubt tended to weld tribal units into small kingdoms and to promote the monarchic system. But



intertribal feuds were frequent and bitter. The Aryans of the Punjab, like the Gauls who settled in northern Italy, and the clans of the Scottish Highlands in the Middle Ages, were continually divided among themselves, and greatly occupied in subduing rivals and in harrying their cattle.

Villages were protected by stockades or earthworks against the attacks of enemies and wild beasts, or they contained strongholds. They were governed by headsmen, who were, no doubt, military leaders also; disputes were settled by a judge. Land, especially grazing land, appears to have been held in common by communities, but there are indications that cultivated plots and houses were owned by families and ultimately by individuals, the father in such cases being the supreme authority. Village communities, however, might be migratory, and certain of them may have had seasonal areas of settlement.

Permanent villages existed in groups and also at some distance from one another, and were connected by roads, and one clan might embrace several separate communities. Trade was conducted by barter, the cow being the standard of value, but in time jewels and gold ornaments were used like money for purchases; "nishka", a necklet, afterwards signified a coin. Foreign traders were not unknown at an early period. The use of alphabetic signs appears to have been introduced by Semites before the close of the Vedic period; from these evolved ultimately the scientific Sanskrit alphabet and grammar.

In the Iranian period<sup>1</sup> there were social divisions of the people, but the hereditary system does not appear to have obtained until the close of Rigvedic times. Kings might be elected, or a military aristocracy might impose its sway over an area; a priest was originally a poet or

<sup>1</sup> A convenient term as explained in our Introduction.



leader of thought, or a man of elevated character, like the Scottish Highland *duine-usual*, the "upwardly man", who might be the son of a chief or of the humblest member of a community.

The earliest Aryan divisions of society were apparently marked by occupations. At first there were three grades: warriors, priests, and traders, but all classes might engage in agricultural pursuits; even in the Epic period princes counted and branded cattle. In the later Vedic age, however, a rigid system of castes came into existence, the result, apparently, of having to distinguish between Aryans and aborigines at first, and subsequently between the various degrees of Aryans who had intermarried with aliens. Caste (*Varna*) signifies colour, and its relation to occupation is apparent in the four divisions—Brahmans, priests; Kshatriyas, the military aristocracy; Vaisyas, commoners, workers, and traders, who were freemen; and Sudras, slaves and aborigines. In the *Yajurveda*, the third Veda, the caste system is found established on a hereditary basis. The three upper castes, which were composed of Aryans only, partook in all religious ceremonials, but the members of the Sudra caste were hedged about by severe restrictions. The knowledge of the Vedas was denied to them, and they were not allowed to partake of Soma offerings, and although in the process of time their position improved somewhat in the religious life of the mingled people, their social inferiority was ever emphasized; they might become traders, but never Kshatriyas or Brahmans.

The most renowned of early Brahmans were the Rishis, the poets<sup>1</sup> who composed the "new songs" to the

<sup>1</sup> "A Rishi, 'seer', is primarily a composer of hymns. . . . The Rishis ultimately become the representatives of a sacred past." *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, vol. i, pp. 115-117 (1912).



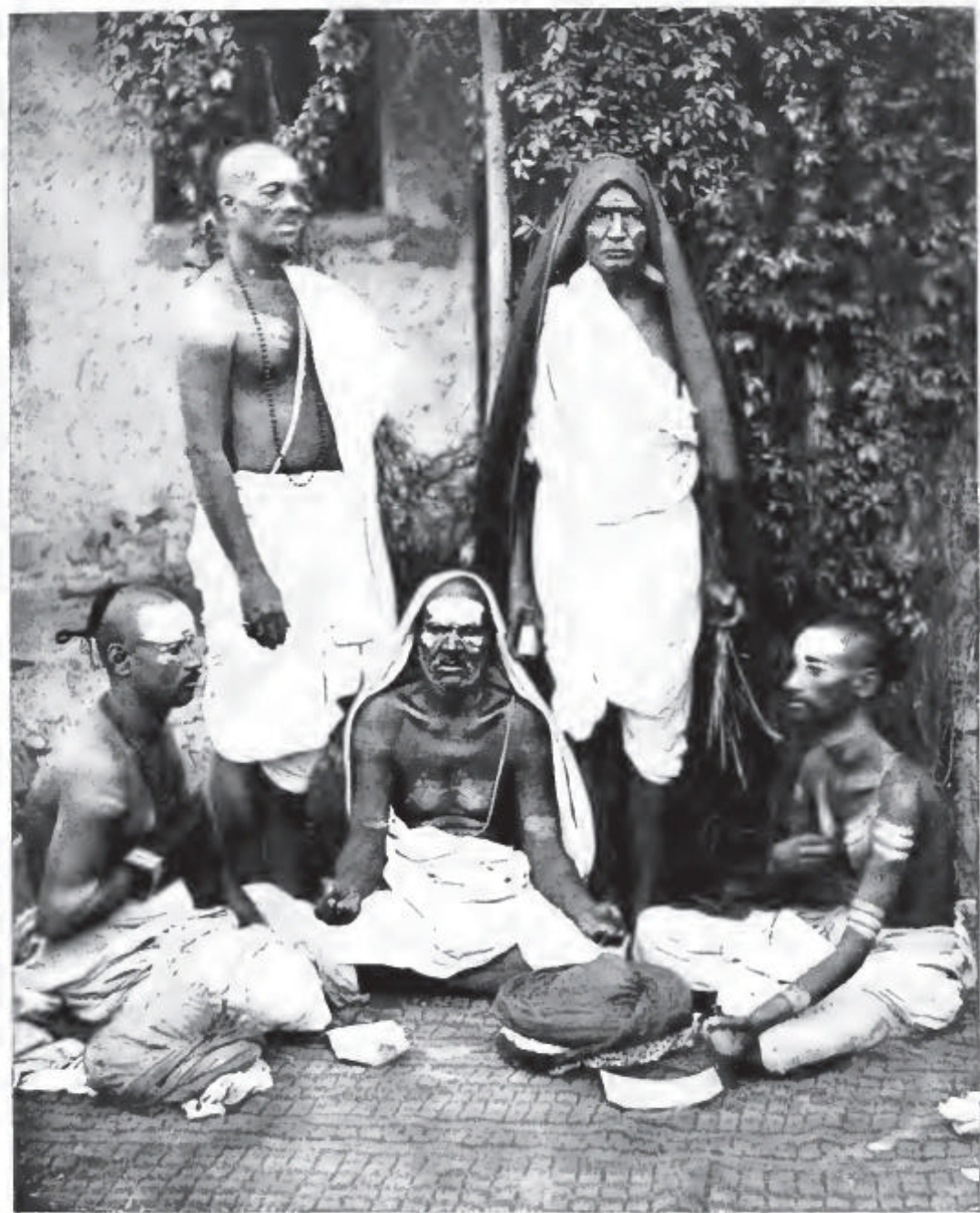
gods. They were regarded as divinely inspired men and their fame was perpetuated after death. Several renowned poets are referred to in sacred literature and invested with great sanctity. The hymns or mantras were committed to memory and then handed down from generation to generation. At religious ceremonies these were chanted by reciters, the Hotri priests. There were also priests who were skilled in the correct performance of sacrificial rites, and family priests, the Purohitas, who were the guides, philosophers, and friends of kings and noblemen. A Rishi might be a Purohita and a seer, who ensured by the performance of mystic ceremonies a monarch's success in battle and afterwards celebrated his achievements in song.

In the process of time an organized priesthood came into existence, and a clan or kingdom had its chief priest. The production of new hymns came to an end; those which existed were considered sufficient for all purposes; religious beliefs were systematized, and an arbitrary ritual became more and more complicated.

There are indications that at an early period a chief or king might offer up a sacrifice, but when the profession of the Brahman became hereditary, no rite could be performed unless presided over by holy men. A sacrifice might be rendered futile by an error in the construction of an altar, or in the order of ceremonial practices, or by failure to select appropriate chants. The Asuras and Rakshasas and other demons were ever hovering round the altar, endeavouring to obstruct ceremonies and to take advantage of ritualistic errors to intercept offerings intended for the gods. It was by making sacrifices that man was believed to obtain power over the gods, or magical control over the forces of nature.

For the performance of some sacrifices a day of pre-





GROUP OF PRESENT-DAY BRAHMANS





paration might be required. Altars had to be erected with mathematical exactness; the stones were blessed and anointed; offerings were made at every stage of the work so that the various deities might give protection in their various spheres. The following extract from one of the Brahmanas affords a glimpse of the preparatory rites:—

Thrice he (the priest) perambulates it (the altar); for thrice he walks round it (whilst sprinkling); thus as many times as he walks round it, so many times does he perambulate it. . . .

Having thereupon put that stone into the water pitcher, (he) throws it in that (south-westerly) direction, for that is Nirriti's region; he thus consigns pain to Nirriti's region. . . .

Outside the fire altars he throws it, &c.<sup>1</sup>

Human failings may be imputed to Brahmans, but it must be recognized that the ideals of their caste were of a high order. They were supposed to be born with "spiritual lustre", and their lives were consecrated to the instruction and uplifting of mankind and the attainment of salvation. A Brahman's life was divided into four periods. The first was the period of childhood, and the second was the period of probation, when he went to live in a forest hermitage, where he acted as the servant of a revered old sage, his spiritual father, and received instruction in Brahmanic knowledge for a number of years. During the third period the Brahman lived the worldly life; he married and reared a family and performed the duties pertaining to his caste. Hospitality was one of the chief worldly duties; if a stranger, even although he might be an enemy, came and asked for food he received it, although the Brahman family should have to fast to supply him. In the fourth period the Brahman, having proved himself a faithful husband and exemplary father,

<sup>1</sup> *Satapatha Brahmana*, trans. by Prof. Eggeling (*Sacred Books of the East*, No. XLIII, p. 170).



divided his worldly possessions between his grown-up sons and daughters; then he abandoned his comfortable home and, assuming the deerskin clothing of hermits, went to live in a lonely forest, or among the Himalayan mountains, to prepare for the coming of death, far away from the shadows cast by sin and sorrow. In solitude he performed rigid penances and addressed himself with single-minded devotion to the contemplation of spiritual problems. Subduing the five senses, he attained to the state of Yoga (concentration). Placing his mind entirely upon the contemplation of the soul, he became united ultimately with the World Soul (God), thus obtaining the release which was Salvation. Some Brahmans were teachers who instructed pupils and composed the sacred writings. The forest hermitages were the universities of ancient India.

The profession of the priesthood had certainly its mercenary aspect; sacrificial fees were fixed as well as sacrificial rites, and a not unimportant part of a ceremony was the offering of generous gifts to the Brahmans, who presided at the altar. But on the whole the riches thus expended were not given in vain. As in Egypt, the rise and endowment of the priestly cult was due to the accumulation of wealth which enabled a section of society to find leisure for study and the promotion of culture. Aryan civilization in India owed much to the Brahmans. They introduced and elaborated alphabetic signs; the devoted scholars among them compiled the first Sanskrit grammar and studied the art of composition. Among the hermits there were great and original thinkers who laid the basis of Indian metaphysical thought, and rose from the materialism of the early Vedic hymns to the idealism of the speculative prose works, which included the *Forest Books*, a name redolent of leafy solitude and of simple





SADHUS (RELIGIOUS MENDICANTS) AT BENARES





and contemplative lives on the banks of sweetly-flowing waters. Even their devotion to the mysteries of sacrificial ritual, which became more and more complicated, was not unproductive of permanent benefits to mankind. The necessity for the exact construction of altars, and the observance of ceremonies in due season, promoted the study of mathematical science. These Brahmans invented the numerical figures which have attained universal usage, and in time they gave the world Algebra. The influence of their culture may be traced in other directions. At the present day it has indirectly brought into existence the science of Comparative Religion.

At the close of the Rigvedic period the Aryans had extended their sway to the district known as Madhyadesa, the "middle country", between the "Five Rivers" of the Punjab and the upper reaches of the Jumna and Ganges. Pioneers were meantime pressing southward and eastward towards the sea. Migrations were, no doubt, due to propulsion as well as attraction; fresh folk-waves probably poured in periodically from the north-west, while the settled population must have increased rapidly in the fertile land controlled by the invaders, to whom the aborigines offered but slight resistance.

The second Vedic book, the *Samaveda*, does not contain much fresh material: it is mainly a compilation of the Rigvedic hymns which the priests chanted at the Soma sacrifice. Its sole interest, from a historical point of view, is the evidence it affords of the steady growth of ritualistic tendencies. A new era of Aryan civilization is revealed, however, by the third Veda, the *Yajurveda*. In this book the tribes are found to have extended their area of control down the Ganges valley, and southward along the banks of the Indus. It is of interest to note here that the word "Samudra", first applied to the broadening Indus where



it receives its tributaries, and signifying "collected waters", became in the *Brahmanas* the name of the world-encircling ocean, across which in due time loomed the ships which "once in three years" carried to Solomon's order "gold, and silver, ivory (or elephants' tusks), and apes, and peacocks".<sup>1</sup>

In the *Yajurveda* we find that Aryan civilization has developed greatly in the course of three or four centuries. Powerful tribes have established kingdoms, and small states are being subjected to the larger. The hardened system of social organization is reflected by the references to the four distinct castes. Hitherto the Kshatriyas have controlled the destinies of the people, but now the Brahmanas achieve an intellectual conquest and impose their sway over kings and nobles. The holy men are no longer the humble servants of generous patrons; they are the human representatives of the all-controlling deities. "Verily, there are two kinds of gods; for the gods themselves, assuredly, are gods, and those priests who have studied and teach Vedic lore, are the human gods."

The offerings to the deities are "consecrated by the feeding of priests".<sup>2</sup>

Even the gods become dependent upon the priests, who provided them by offering sacrifices with the "food" they required, and also with the Soma which gave them length of years. Indra could not combat against the Asuras without the assistance of the priests who chanted formulas to ensure victory; it was, therefore, due to the power exercised, in the first place, by the priests that the drought demon was overcome and rain fell in abundance.

Priests might also accumulate in heaven credit balances

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings, x, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Satapatha Brahmana*, translated by Professor Eggeling, Part I, p. 374 (*Sacred Books of the East*).





# A YOGI ON A BED OF SPIKES

*An example of present-day austerities*





of Celestial power by undergoing penances for long periods. A heavy debt was also due to them by the gods for their sacrificial offerings. When a Brahman desired to exercise his accumulated power, he might even depose the deities, who were therefore placed under compulsion to fulfil his demands; his Celestial credit might exceed the "paying" possibilities of the supreme Powers. In the sacred tales Brahmans were credited with performing rigid penances for centuries.

In the fourth Veda, the *Atharva-veda*, the revival of belief in formulas is emphasized. This book, which did not receive recognition as an inspired work at first, is in the main a collection of metrical charms of great antiquity. Many resemble closely those which have been collected by folk-lorists during late years in the Scottish Highlands and elsewhere throughout Europe. The Rigveda hymns reveal the religious beliefs and aspirations of the advanced thinkers of their age; the *Atharva-veda* contains the germs of folk religion—the magical formulas chanted to dispel or invoke the vague spirits who helped or thwarted mankind. It teaches that the Universe is upheld by sacrifice and the spiritual exaltation of Brahmans, and that Brahmanic power may be exercised by the use of appropriate charms. Human beings might also be influenced by the spirits invoked by means of formulas.

Primitive man believed that all emotions were caused by spirits. When the poet sang, he was "inspired"—he drew in a spirit; ecstasy was "a standing outside of oneself", the soul having escaped temporarily from the body. Wrath was caused by a demon, and "battle fury" by the spirit of war which possessed the warrior. When a human being was "seized" by a fit, his convulsions were believed to be caused by the demon who had entered his body. Love was inspiration in the literal sense, and an



Indian lover might compel a heedless lady to regard him with favour by reciting an Atharva-vedic spell. Apparently the love spirit had a weakness for honey. The lover chanted:

Honey be mine at the tip of my tongue,  
May sweetness of honey pervade my speech,  
So that my love may come under my spell—  
So that my lady may yield to my will.

*Atharva-veda*, i, 34.

As the grass is shorn from earth by the wind,  
So may thy soul be shorn to my will,  
And then, O lady, thou'lt give me thy love,  
Nor be averse to me as thou wert.

*Atharva-veda*, ii, 30.

A lover, we find, can invoke the lady to embrace him "as the creeper embraces a tree"; if she clings to his arm he can cause her to cling to his heart; his influence over her mind is like the influence of a wing-beating eagle over the wind. It may be, too, that a neglected girl finds it necessary to prepare a love potion with "salve, sweet wood, and spikenard", and to cause the heart of an ungallant swain to suffer from "a parching heart", which "languishes for love", and experiences the "yearning of the Apsaras".

Warriors were charmed against spells, cattle and sheep were charmed against wild beasts, a house was charmed against evil spirits and demons.<sup>1</sup> Greedy demons of disease, who devoured the flesh of patients, were greatly feared: Brahmans performed ceremonies of riddance and

<sup>1</sup> There are formulas in Gaelic for blessing a house, &c. The customs of nailing horse-shoes upon doors and hanging up holly at Christmas for protection against evil spirits indicate the persistence of ceremonial practices long after ancient beliefs have been forgotten.



“plagued them as the tiger plagues the cattle owners”.  
The following is a charm against cough:

As the soul with the soul's desires swiftly to a distance flies,  
Thus do thou, O cough, fly forth along the soul's course of  
flight.

As a well-sharpened arrow swiftly to a distance flies,  
Thus do thou, O cough, fly forth along the expanse of the  
earth.

As the rays of the sun swiftly to a distance fly,  
Thus do thou, O cough, fly forth along the flood of the sea.  
*Atharva-veda*, vi, 105.<sup>1</sup>

A Scottish Highland charm similarly invokes the Powers, or the “King of the Elements”:

To cause the wrath of men to ebb,  
Like to a wave from the sea to the floodtide,  
And a wave from the floodtide to the ebb.

Occasionally a mantra is infused with high religious fervour. A Brahman might pray:

From the sins which knowingly or unknowingly we have committed, do ye, all gods, of one accord release us.

If awake or asleep, to sin inclined, I have committed a sin, may what has been, and what shall be, as if from a wooden post, release me.  
*Atharva-veda*, vi, 115. 1-2.<sup>2</sup>

Another hymn of this character concludes:

In heaven, where our righteous friends are blessed,  
Having cast off diseases from their bodies,  
From lameness free and not deformed in members,  
There may we see our parents and our children.

*Atharva-veda*, vi, 120.<sup>3</sup>

While the tribes were spreading southward and east-

<sup>1</sup> Bloomfield's *Atharva-veda* (*Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlii).

<sup>2</sup> Bloomfield's translation.

<sup>3</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Professor Macdonell, p. 199.

ward, Madhyadesa, the "middle country", remained the centre of Brahmanic culture. In that district came into existence the earliest sacred prose works which constitute the basis of classic Hinduism. The first were the oldest *Brahmanas*; these comment on and expound the doctrines of the Vedic hymns, especially in their relation to the ritual of sacrifices. To the *Brahmanas* were added the *Aran'yakas*, "forest books", which are more speculative in tendency. The expository appendices to the *Aran'yakas* are called the *Upanishads*, "the sittings down", or "the sessions"—the pupil sat at his master's feet—and in these a high level of thought is attained. "For the first time", says Professor Macdonell, "we find the Absolute grasped and proclaimed."

All the tribes were not infused with the same degree of culture. In the *Yajur-veda* period there were various schools of thought, and these continued to exercise their influence into historic times, even after Upanishadic doctrines became widespread.

Ere we deal, however, with the new theological doctrines of the Brahmanic teachers, we should follow the development of sacrificial practices, because from these evolved the bold Pantheism which characterized the conception of the World Soul, *Brahmā*.

The two greatest sacrifices were the *purusha-medha*, the human sacrifice, and *aswa-medha*, the sacrifice of the horse. Both were prevalent in early times, and in simpler form than they survive to us in the doctrinal works and the Epics. A human sacrifice was believed to be of highest potency, but it became extremely rare, as in Egypt, among the ruling and cultured classes. It was perpetuated in India, however, until about half a century ago, by the Dravidian Khonds in Bengal and Madras, and had to be suppressed by British officers.



Human sacrifices, in historic times, were "offered to the earth goddess, Tari Pennu or Bera Pennu, and were believed to ensure good crops, and immunity from all diseases and accidents". One official record states that the victim, after being stabbed by the priest, was "literally cut to pieces". Each person who was "so fortunate as to procure it carried away a morsel of the flesh, and presented it to the idol of his own village".<sup>1</sup>

From the practice of sacrificing human beings arose the conception that the first act of Creation was, if not human sacrifice, at least the sacrifice of the first being with human attributes. The Universe is the giant Purusha ("man"); he is "all that hath been and shall be". In a Rigvedic hymn, which is regarded as being of later composition than the Rigvedic period, it is set forth:

"When the gods performed a sacrifice with Purusha as the oblation, the Spring was its butter, the Summer its fuel, and the Autumn its (accompanying) offering. This victim, Purusha, born in the beginning, they immolated on the sacrificial grass."

From this universal sacrifice issued forth all that exists. The Brahman rose from Purusha's mouth, the Rajanya (Kshatriya) from his arms, the Vaisya from his thighs, and the Sudra sprang from his feet. Indra and Agni came from his mouth, and Vayu from his breath.

"When the gods, performing sacrifice, bound Purusha as a victim, there were seven sticks (stuck up) for it (around the fire). . . . With sacrifice the gods performed the sacrifice. These were the earliest rites."<sup>2</sup>

"From his (Purusha's) navel arose the air, from his head the sky, from his ears the four quarters; in this

<sup>1</sup> *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India*, by Edgar Thurston, p. 299 et seq., 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Muir's Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i, pp. 9-10.



manner (the gods) formed the worlds." This conception resembles closely the story in Teutonic mythology of the cutting up by the gods of the body of the chaos giant Ymer; his skull became the sky, his bones the rocks, his blood the sea, and so on. One of the Chinese P'an Ku<sup>1</sup> myths is of similar character; the world is composed of different parts of his body. The Babylonian Merodach also divided the body of the chaos demon, Tiawath or Tiamat; her head became the sky, her body the earth, and her blood the rivers which fill the sea. Purusha, the chaos giant of India, had "a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet"; the earth was equal to the space covered by ten of his fingers; he was "the whole universe".

The horse sacrifice was also infused, like the human sacrifice, with symbolic significance. It was probably practised in the early Iranian period by the Aryan horse tamers, who may have substituted man's fleet-footed friend for human beings. The Mongolian Buriats in the vicinity of Lake Baikal, Siberia, are the latest surviving sacrificers of the domesticated animal. Their horse sacrifice (Tailgan) was held on 2 August on a sacred hill inhabited by their gods, the Burkans, "the masters". The horse was bound, thrown upon its back and held tightly by ropes, while the officiating person cut open its breast and pulled out the pulsating heart like the sacrificers of human beings in Ancient Mexico. The animal's bones were burned on the altars, and the flesh was cooked and devoured by the worshippers. Portions of the flesh, and some of the broth prepared, were given to the flames, which also received libations of the liquor called *tarasun*, distilled from soui milk. *Tarasun* was

<sup>1</sup> P'an Ku in his giant form. Like the Egyptian Ptah, he is now a dwarf and anon a giant.



the Soma of the Buriats, and their fire spirit was, like the Indian Agni, a ready drinker of it. Bits of food were also flung to aerial spirits, while oblations were poured on the hill, the belief prevailing that these offerings multiplied sufficiently to permit of the gods feeding sumptuously. As each of the worshippers of the spirits of nature accepted a portion of sacrificial food, a prayer was chanted, entreating the gods to cause increase of all things.

"Let our villages be one verst longer," they said; "create cattle in our enclosures; under our blankets create a son; send down rain from high heaven to us; cause much grass to grow; create so much grain that the sickle cannot raise it, and so much grass that the scythe cannot cut it."

After the sacrifice, the food was divided and the fragments that remained were carefully burned, "for none of it must be eaten by dogs; that would be desecration, and misfortune would follow in its wake".<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this annual sacrifice was evidently to secure fertility and prosperity generally, and we refer to it here so fully because of the light it throws on the Indian ceremonial which it resembles closely in some of its details.

There are two direct references to the horse sacrifice in the *Rigveda*.<sup>2</sup> The animal is "covered with rich trappings" and led thrice round the altar. It is accompanied by a goat, which is killed first to "announce the sacrifice to the gods". A goat was also slain at a burial to inform the gods that the soul was about to enter Heaven.

In the *Story of Nala* and in the *Ramáyana*, the horse

<sup>1</sup> *A Journey in Southern Siberia*, by Jeremiah Curtin, pp. 44-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Rigveda*, i, 162, and i, 163.



sacrifice is performed to secure human offspring. A second *Ramáyana* horse sacrifice is offered as an atonement after the slaying of the demon Ravana. An elaborate account of this great ceremonial is also given in the *Mahábhárata*. It was performed after "the great war" on the advice of the sage Vyasa to atone for the slaying of kinsmen. The horse was let loose and an army followed it. Whichever country the animal entered had to be conquered for the owner of the horse, so that only a powerful monarch could fulfil the conditions of the sacrifice. A hundred such sacrifices might enable a king to depose Indra.

It is significant, however, that the animal was released to wander from kingdom to kingdom on the night of the full moon in the spring month of Choitro, and that it returned in the following year at the close of the winter season. When the ground was prepared by being ploughed by the king, the queen followed him, sowing the seeds of every kind of vegetable and curative herb which grew in the kingdom. A countless number of representative animals were sacrificed before the sacred horse was slain, the rain drum and trumpet were sounded, and the king and queen were drenched with holy water.

The flesh of the horse was cooked and eaten, and Indra and the other gods appeared and partook of their portions. Pieces were also flung in the fire, and the fire received also its meed of Soma. When the sacrifice was completed, the king divided the herb offerings among the people; what remained over was burned.

In the *Mahábhárata* a white horse is sacrificed, but in the *Ramáyana* a black victim is offered up. White horses were sacrificed to Mars by the Romans; the Greeks sacrificed white horses to the sun by throwing



them in the sea; the Spartans offered up their horses, like the Buriats, on a hilltop.

There can be little doubt that the Greek and Roman horse sacrifices were also intended to ensure fertility. A horse was offered up to Diana at the August harvest festival, and we know that that popular goddess gave plentiful crops and was the guardian of flocks and herds and wild animals of the chase; she also presided at birth, and women invoked her aid. Virgins and youths took a prominent part at this harvest festival. The Roman horse sacrifice took place on 15 October. The animal was offered to Mars; the head was conveyed to the king's house<sup>1</sup> and decorated with loaves, and the blood was preserved until April, when it was mixed by virgins with the blood of calves; this mixture was given to shepherds to ensure the increase of flocks which were fumigated. In the *Mahábhárata* the king and the princes stand for a time in the smoke belching from the altar, to be cleansed of their sins.

The Persians, and other peoples of Aryan speech and custom, sacrificed horses regularly. But the custom was not confined to Indo-Europeans. The Scythians,<sup>2</sup> who were probably Mongols, not only offered horses to the Spirit of Fertility, but also, like the Buriats, to the dead. The Patagonians sacrificed horses to tree spirits. In this connection it may be noted that some European horse sacrifices took place in sacred groves; the Buriats tied their horse to a birch tree, which was carried to the mountain top and fixed to a stake; the Indian sacrificial posts were probably substitutes for trees.

In the *Upanishads* the sacrifice of the horse is infused, as we have indicated, with mystic symbolism. We read:

<sup>1</sup> That is, the so-called "royal house", or house of the "king of the sacred rites".

<sup>2</sup> A broad-headed people.



"The dawn in truth is the head of the sacrificial horse. The sun is the eye; the wind the breath . . . the year the body, the heaven is the back . . . the constellations the bones; the sky the muscles; the rivers, arteries and veins; the liver and spleen, the mountains; the herbs and trees, the various kinds of hair." The horse is also identified with the sun: "The sun, as long as he rises is the fore part of the body; the sun, as long as he descends is the hind part of the body, &c." The horse is also day and night in turn, and its birthplace is the sea; it carries the gods and the Asuras; it is the symbol of Death, "who is voracity", from whom all things came. "There was not anything here before." Death first "created this mind, desiring, *May I have a soul.* He went forth worshipping. From him, when worshipping, the waters were produced. . . . The froth of the waters which was there became consistent. This became the earth. . . . He made himself threefold. His eastern quarter is the head . . . his western quarter is the tail, &c."

The work of Creation proceeds, and then "he (Death as the Creator) resolved to devour all that he had created; for he eats all. . . . He is the eater of the whole universe; this whole universe is his food."

After a year of purification the Creator slaughtered his horse body. "He gave up the animal to the gods. Therefore they (the gods) slaughter the purified animal, representing in its nature, as Prajapati, all deities. He (the Creator) is the Ashwameda<sup>1</sup> who shines."

The gods performed the sacrifice to overcome the demons, the representatives of sin. Therefore the horse sacrifice removes all sin.

After much fantastic symbolism the following lesson

<sup>1</sup> Horse sacrifice.



in the form of a mantra is extracted from the parable of Creation:—

“From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality.”

The Upanishadic treatment of the Purusha myth differs somewhat from the Vedic, and is intended to strengthen the Monotheistic tendencies displayed in some of the hymns.

When the Universal soul, according to this later doctrine, took at the beginning “the shape of a man” . . . he “beheld nothing but himself”.

“He said first *This, I am*. Hence the name of ‘I’ was produced. Therefore, even now a man, when called, says first, ‘It is I’, and tells afterwards any other name that belongs to him. And, because He, as the first of all of them consumed by fire all the sins, therefore he is called Purusha. . . .

He was afraid; therefore man, when alone, is afraid. He then looked round. Since nothing but myself exists, of whom should I be afraid? Hence his fear departed; for whom should he fear, since fear arises from another.

He did not feel delight. Therefore nobody, when alone, feels delight. He was desirous of a second. He was in the same state as husband (Pati) and wife (Patni). . . . He divided this self two-fold. Hence were husband and wife produced. Therefore was this only a half of himself, as a split pea is of the whole. . . . This void is thus completed by woman. He approached her. Hence men were born.”

The first two “mortals” then assumed the forms of all creatures, male and female in turn. They were, in order, the first cattle, the first horses, the first asses, the first goats, the first sheep, and so on. “In this manner He created every living pair whatsoever down to the ants.” Then he reflected and said: “I am verily this creation, for I created this all.”

The lesson then follows. Men say, "Sacrifice to this, sacrifice to this, sacrifice to one or the other god?" But these words are "not proper", because "He is really this creation; for he verily is all the gods".

Thus the first Being, as a commentator remarked, "whose nature comprehended all elements, who is eternal, who is not conceived by thought, sprang forth by himself. . . . He consumed all sins, for unless one is in a worldly state he cannot consume sins. . . . Being mortal he created immortals."<sup>1</sup>

From the myth of the chaos-giant Purusha we pass to the higher pantheistic conception of Brahmā, the soul of the Universe.

<sup>1</sup> *The Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad.*



## CHAPTER VI

### Mysteries of Creation, the World's Ages, and Soul Wandering

The World Soul—Vedic Hymn of Creation—Brahmā the only Reality—Doctrine of the Upanishads—Creation Myths—The Chaos Egg in India and Egypt—Ancestor Worship—Celestial Rishis and Manus—Influence of Folk Religion—Imported Doctrines—The Yugas or Ages of the Universe—Ape God's Revelations—The Ages in Greek and Celtic Mythologies—Universal Destruction—A Deathless Sage—His Account of the Mysteries—Narayana the Creator and Destroyer—Transmigration of Souls—Beliefs in India, Egypt, Greece, and among the Celts.

BEFORE the Vedic Age had come to a close an unknown poet, who was one of the world's great thinkers, had risen above the popular materialistic ideas concerning the hammer god and the humanized spirits of Nature, towards the conception of the World Soul and the First Cause—the "Unknown God". He sang of the mysterious beginning of all things:

There was neither existence, nor non-existence,  
The kingdom of air, nor the sky beyond.

What was there to contain, to cover in—  
Was it but vast, unfathomed depths of water?

There was no death there, nor Immortality.  
No sun was there, dividing day from night.

Then was there only THAT, resting within itself.  
Apart from it, there was not anything.

At first within the darkness veiled in darkness,  
Chaos unknowable, the All lay hid.

Till straightway from the formless void made manifest  
By the great power of heat was born that germ.

*Rigveda*, x, 129 (Griffith's trans.).

The poet goes on to say that wise men had discovered in their hearts that the germ of Being existed in Not Being. But who, he asked, could tell how Being first originated? The gods came later, and are unable to reveal how Creation began. He who guards the Universe knows, or mayhap he does not know.

Other late Rigvedic poets summed up the eternal question regarding the Great Unknown in the interrogative pronoun "What?" (Ka). Men's minds were confronted by an inspiring and insoluble problem. In our own day the Agnostics say, "I do not know"; but this hackneyed phrase does not reflect the spirit of enquiry like the arresting "What?" of the pondering old forest hermits of ancient India.

The priests who systematized religious beliefs and practices in the *Brahmanas* identified "Ka" with Praja'pati, the Creator, and with Brahma, another name of the Creator.

In the Vedas the word "brahma" signifies "devotion" or "the highest religious knowledge". Later Brahmā (neuter) was applied to the World Soul, the All in All, the primary substance from which all that exists has issued forth, the Eternal Being "of which all are phases"; Brahmā was the Universal Self, the Self in the various Vedic gods, the Self in man, bird, beast, and fish, the Life of Life, the only reality, the unchangeable. This one essence or Self (Atman) permeates the whole Universe. Brahmā is the invisible force in the seed, as he is the



"vital spark" in mobile creatures. In the *Khandogva Upanishad* a young Brahman receives instruction from his father. The sage asks if his pupil has ever endeavoured to find out how he can hear what cannot be heard, how he can see what cannot be seen, and how he can know what cannot be known? He then asks for the fruit of the Nyagrodha tree.

"Here is one, sir."

"Break it."

"It is broken, sir."

"What do you see there?"

"Not anything, sir."

"My son," said the father, "that subtile essence which you do not perceive there, of that very essence this great Nyagrodha tree exists. Believe it, my son. That which is the subtile essence, in it all that exists has itself. It is the True. It is the Self; and thou, my son, art it."

In *Katha Upanishad* a sage declares:

The whole universe trembles within the life (Brahmā); emanating from it (Brahmā) the universe moves on. It is a great fear, like an uplifted thunderbolt. Those who know it become immortal. . . .

As one is reflected in a looking-glass, so the soul is in the body; as in a dream, so in the world of the forefathers; as in water, so in the world of the Gandharvas; as in a picture and in the sunshine, so in the world of Brahmā. . . .

The soul's being (nature) is not placed in what is visible; none beholds it by the eye. . . . Through thinking it gets manifest. Immortal become those who know it. . . .

The soul is not to be gained by word, not by the mind, not by the eye, how could it be perceived by any other than him who declares it exists?

When all the desires cease that are cherished in his heart (intellect) then the mortal becomes immortal.

When all the bonds of the heart are broken in this life, then the mortal becomes immortal. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The salvation of the soul is secured by union with Brahmā, the supreme and eternal Atman (Self), "the power which receives back to itself again all worlds. . . . The identity of the Brahmā and the Atman, of God and the Soul, is the fundamental thought of the entire doctrine of the Upanishads."<sup>2</sup>

Various creation myths were framed by teachers to satisfy the desire for knowledge regarding the beginning of things. The divine incarnation of Brahmā is known as Brahma (masculine) Prajapati, and Nārāyana.

In one account we read: "At first the Universe was not anything. There was neither sky, nor earth, nor air. Being non-existent it resolved, 'Let me be'. It became fervent. From that fervour smoke was produced. It again became fervent. From that fervour fire was produced." Afterwards the fire became "rays" and the rays condensed like a cloud, producing the sea. A magical formula (Dāsahotri) was next created. "Prajapati is the Dāsahotri."

Eminently Brahmanic in character is the comment inserted here: "That man succeeds who, thus knowing the power of austere abstraction (or fervour), practises it."

When Prajapati arose from the primordial waters he "wept, exclaiming, 'For what purpose have I been born if (I have been born) from this which forms no support? . . .' That (the tears) which fell into the water became the earth. That which he wiped away became the air. That which he wiped away, upwards, became the sky. From the circumstance that he wept (*arodit*), these two regions have the name of *rodasi* (worlds) . . ."

<sup>1</sup> Dr. E. Rüer's translation (Calcutta).

<sup>2</sup> Deussen's *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p. 39.





THE BIRTH OF BRAHMA: SPRINGING FROM A LOTUS ISSUING FROM VISHNU (see page 124)

*From an original Indian painting*





Prajapati afterwards created Asuras and cast off his body, which became darkness; he created men and cast off his body, which became moonlight; he created seasons and cast off his body, which became twilight; he created gods and cast off his body, which became day. The Asuras received milk in an earthen dish, men in a wooden dish, the seasons in a silver dish, and the gods were given Soma in a golden dish. In the end Prajapati created Death, "a devourer of creatures".

"Mind (or soul, *manas*) was created from the non-existent", adds a priestly commentator. "Mind created Prajapati. Prajapati created offspring. All this, whatever exists, rests absolutely on mind."<sup>1</sup>

In another mythical account of Creation, Prajapati emerges, like the Egyptian Horus, from a lotus bloom floating on the primordial waters.

The most elaborate story of Creation is found in the *Laws of Manu*, the eponymous ancestor of mankind and the first lawgiver.

It relates that in the beginning the Self-Existent Being desired to create living creatures. He first created the waters, which he called "narah", and then a seed; he flung the seed into the waters, and it became a golden egg which had the splendour of the sun. From the egg came forth Brahma, Father of All. Because Brahma came from the "waters", and they were his first home or path (*ayana*), he is called Narayana.

The Egyptian sun god Ra similarly rose from the primordial waters as the sun-egg. Ptah came from the egg which, according to one myth, was laid by the chaos goose, and to another issued from the mouth of Khnumu.<sup>2</sup> This conception may have had origin in the story of the

<sup>1</sup> Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i, pp. 29-30.

<sup>2</sup> See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.



giant of the folk tales who concealed his soul in the egg, in the tree, and in various animal forms. There are references in Indian literature to Brahma's tree, and Brahma is identified with Purusha, who became in turn a cow, a goat, a horse, &c., to produce living creatures.

In Manu's account of Creation we meet for the first time with the Maha-rishis or Deva-rishis, the Celestial priest poets. These are the mind-born sons of Brahma, who came into existence before the gods and the demons. Indeed, they are credited with some acts of creation. The seven or fourteen Manus were also created at the beginning. Originally there was but a single Manu, "the father of men".

The inclusion of the Rishis and the Manus among the deities is a late development of orthodox Brahmanism. They appear to represent the Fathers (Pitris) who were adored by ancestor worshippers. The tribal patriarch Bhrigu, for instance, was a Celestial Rishi.

It must be borne in mind that more than one current of thought was operating during the course of the centuries, and over a wide area, in shaping the complex religion which culminated in modern Hinduism. The history of Hinduism is the history of a continual struggle between the devotees of folk religion and the expounders of the Forest Books produced by the speculative sages who, in their quest for Truth, used primitive myths to illustrate profound doctrinal teachings. By the common people these myths were given literal interpretation. Among the priests there were also "schools of thought". One class of Brahmans, it has been alleged, was concerned chiefly regarding ritual, the mercenary results of their teachings, and the achievement of political power: men of this type appear to have been too ready



to effect compromises by making concession to popular opinion.

Just as the *Atharva-veda* came into existence as a book after the *Rigveda* had been compiled, so did many traditional beliefs of animistic character receive recognition by Brahmanic "schools" after the period of the early *Upanishads*. It may be, however, that we should also recognize in these "innovations" the influence of races which imported their own modes of thought, or of Aryan tribes that had been in contact for long periods with other civilizations known and unknown.

In endeavouring to trace the sources of foreign influences, we should not always expect to find clues in the mythologies of great civilizations like Babylonia, Assyria, or Egypt alone. The example of the Hebrews, a people who never invented anything, and yet produced the greatest sacred literature of the world, is highly suggestive in this connection. It is possible that an intellectual influence was exercised in early times over great conquering races by humble forgotten peoples whose artifacts give no indication of their mental activity.

In Indian Aryan mythology we are suddenly confronted at a comparatively late period, at any rate some time after tribal settlements were effected all over Hindustan from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea, with fully developed conceptions regarding the World's Ages and Transmigration of Souls, which, it is quite evident, did not originate after the Aryan conquest of Hindustan. Both doctrines can be traced in Greek and Celtic (Irish) mythologies, but they are absent from Teutonic mythology. From what centre and what race they originally emanated we are unable to discover. The problem presented is a familiar one. At the beginnings of all ancient religious systems and great civilizations we catch



glimpses of unknown and vanishing peoples who had sowed the seeds for the harvests which their conquerors reaped in season.

The World's Ages are the "Yugas" of Brahmanism. "Of this elaborate system . . . no traces are found in the hymns of the *Rigveda*. Their authors were, indeed, familiar with the word 'yuga', which frequently occurs in the sense of age, generation, or tribe. . . . The first passage of the *Rigveda* in which there is any indication of a considerable mundane period being noted is where 'a first' or an earlier age (yuga) of the gods is mentioned when 'the existent sprang from the non-existent'. . . . In one verse of the *Atharva-veda*, however, the word 'yuga' is so employed as to lead to the supposition that a period of very long duration is intended. It is there said: 'We allot to thee a hundred, ten thousand years, two, three, four ages (yugas)'."<sup>1</sup>

Professor Muir traced references in the *Brahmanas* to the belief in "Yugas" as "Ages", but showed that these were isolated ideas with which, however, the authors of these books were becoming familiar.

When the system of Yugas was developed by the Indian priestly mathematicians, the result was as follows:—

One year of mortals is equal to one day of the gods. 12,000 divine years are equal to a period of four Yugas, which is thus made up, viz.:

Krita Yuga,	with its mornings and evenings,	4,800	divine years.
Treta Yuga,	" " " "	3,600	"
Dwāpara Yuga,	" " " "	2,400	"
Kali Yuga,	" " " "	1,200	"
Making		12,000	"

These 12,000 divine years equal 4,320,000 years of

<sup>1</sup> Muir's *Original Sanskrit Texts*, vol. i, p. 46.



mortals, each human year being composed of 360 days. A thousand of these periods of 4,320,000 years equals one day (Kalpa) of Brahma. During "the day of Brahma" fourteen Manus reign: each Manu period is a Manvantara. A year of Brahma is composed of 360 Kalpas, and he endures for 100 of these years. One half of Brahma's existence has now expired.

At the end of each "day" (Kalpa) Brahma sleeps for a night of equal length, and before falling asleep the Universe becomes water as at the beginning. He creates anew when he wakes on the morning of the next Kalpa.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most interesting accounts of the Yugas is given in the *Mahābhārata*. It is embedded in a narrative which reflects a phase of the character of that great epic.

Bhima of the Pan'davas, the human son of the wind god Vayu, once went forth to obtain for his beloved queen the flowers of Paradise—those Celestial lotuses of a thousand petals with sun-like splendour and unearthly fragrance, which prolong life and renew beauty: they grow in the demon-guarded woodland lake in the region of Kuvera, god of treasure. Bhima hastened towards the north-east, facing the wind, armed with a golden bow and snake-like arrows; like an angry lion he went, nor ever felt weary. Having climbed a great mountain he entered a forest which is the haunt of demons, and he saw stately and beautiful trees, blossoming creepers, flowers of various hues, and birds with gorgeous plumage. A soft wind blew in his face; it was anointed with the perfume of Celestial lotus; it was as refreshing as the touch of a father's hand. Beautiful was that sacred retreat. The great clouds spread out like wings and the mountain seemed to dance; shining streams adorned it like to a necklace of pearls.

<sup>1</sup> Abridged from Muir's *Original Sanskrit Text*, pp. 43, 44, and Wilson's *Manu*, p. 50.



Bhima went speedily through the forest; stags, with grass in their mouths, looked up at him unafraid; invisible Yakshas and Gandharvas watched him as he went on swifter than the wind, and ever wondering how he could obtain the flowers of Paradise without delay. . . .

At length he hastened like to a hurricane, making the earth tremble under his feet, and lions and tigers and elephants and bears arose and took flight from before him. Terrible was then the roaring of Bhima. Birds fluttered terror-stricken and flew away; in confusion arose the geese and the ducks and the herons and the kokilas.<sup>1</sup> . . . Bhima tore down branches; he struck trees and overthrew them; he smote and slew elephants and lions and tigers that crossed his path. He blew on his war-shell and the heavens trembled; the forest was stricken with fear; mountain caves echoed the clamour; elephants trumpeted in terror and lions howled dismally.

The ape god Hanuman<sup>2</sup> was awakened; drowsily he yawned and he lashed his long tail with tempest fury until it stretched forth like a mighty pole and obstructed the path of Bhima. Thus the ape god, who was also a son of Vayu, the wind, made Bhima to pause. Opening his red sleepy eyes, he said: "Sick am I, but I was slumbering sweetly; why hast thou awakened me so rudely? Whither art thou going? Yonder mountains are closed against thee: thou art treading the path of the gods. Therefore pause and repose here: do not hasten to destruction."

Said Bhima: "Who art thou? I am a Kshatriya, the son of Vayu. . . . Arise and let me pass, or else thou wilt perish."

Hanuman said: "I am sickly and cannot move; leap over me."

<sup>1</sup> Indian cuckoo.

<sup>2</sup> In his character as the Typhoon.





10

# HANUMAN

*From a bronze in the Victoria and Albert Museum*





Said Bhima: "I cannot leap over thee. It is forbidden by the Supreme Soul, else would I bound as Hanuman bounded over the ocean, for I am his brother."

Hanuman said: "Then move my tail and go past."

Then Bhima endeavoured to lift the tail of the ape god, but failed, and he said: "Who art thou that hath assumed the form of an ape; art thou a god, or a spirit, or a demon?"

Hanuman said: "I am the son of Vayu, even Hanuman. Thou art my elder brother."

Said Bhima: "I would fain behold the incomparable form thou didst assume to leap over the ocean."

Hanuman said: "At that Age the universe was not as it is now. Thou canst not behold the form I erstwhile had. . . . In Krita Yuga there was one state of things and in the Treta Yuga another; greater change came with Dwāpara Yuga, and in the present Yuga there is lessening, and I am not what I have been. The gods, the saints, and all things that are have changed. I have conformed with the tendency of the present age and the influence of Time."

Said Bhima: "I would fain learn of thee regarding the various Yugas. Speak and tell what thou dost know, O Hanuman."

The ape god then spake and said: "The Krita Yuga (Perfect Age) was so named because there was but one religion, and all men were saintly: therefore they were not required to perform religious ceremonies. Holiness never grew less, and the people did not decrease. There were no gods in the Krita Yuga, and there were no demons or Yakshas, and no Rakshasas or Nagas. Men neither bought nor sold; there were no poor and no rich; there was no need to labour, because all that men required was obtained by the power of will; the chief



virtue was the abandonment of all worldly desires. The Krita Yuga was without disease; there was no lessening with the years; there was no hatred, or vanity, or evil thought whatsoever; no sorrow, no fear. All mankind could attain to supreme blessedness. The universal soul was Narayana: he was *White*; he was the refuge of all and was sought for by all; the identification of self with the universal soul was the whole religion of the Perfect Age.

"In the Treta Yuga sacrifices began, and the World Soul became *Red*; virtue lessened a quarter. Mankind sought truth and performed religious ceremonies; they obtained what they desired by giving and by doing.

"In the Dwāpara Yuga the aspect of the World Soul was *Yellow*: religion lessened one-half. The Veda, which was one (the *Rigveda*) in the Krita Yuga, was divided into four parts, and although some had knowledge of the four Vedas, others knew but three or one. Mind lessened, Truth declined, and there came desire and diseases and calamities; because of these men had to undergo penances. It was a decadent Age by reason of the prevalence of sin.

"In the Kali Yuga<sup>1</sup> the World Soul is *Black* in hue: it is the Iron Age; only one quarter of virtue remaineth. The world is afflicted, men turn to wickedness; disease cometh; all creatures degenerate; contrary effects are obtained by performing holy rites; change passeth over all things, and even those who live through many Yugas must change also."

Having spoken thus, Hanuman bade Bhima to turn back, but Bhima said: "I cannot leave thee until I have gazed upon thy former shape."

Then Hanuman favoured his brother, and assumed

<sup>1</sup> The present Age, according to Hindu belief.



his vast body; he grew till he was high as the Vindhya mountain: he was like to a great golden peak with splendour equal to the sun, and he said: "I can assume even greater height and bulk by reason of mine own power."

Having spoken thus, Hanuman permitted Bhima to proceed on his way under the protection of Vayu, god of wind. He went towards the flowery steeps of the sacred mountain, and at length he reached the Celestial lotus lake of Kuvera, which was shaded by trees and surrounded by lilies; the surface of the waters was covered with golden lotuses which had stalks of lapis lazuli. Yakshas, with big eyes, came out against Bhima, but he slew many, and those that remained were put to flight. He drank the waters of the lake, which renewed his strength. Then he gathered the Celestial lotuses for his queen.

In this tale we discover the ancient Indo-European myth regarding the earth's primitive races. The first age is the White Age, the second is the Red Age, the third the Yellow Age, and the fourth, the present Kali Yuga, is the Black or Iron Age.

Hesiod, the Greek poet, in his *Works and Days*, divided the mythical history of Greece similarly, but the order of the Ages was different; the first was the Golden Age (yellow); the second was the Silver Age (white); the third was the Bronze Age (red); the fourth was the Age of the Heroes; and the fifth was the Age in which Hesiod lived—the Iron (black) Age. The fourth Age is evidently a late interpolation. Authorities consider that the Heroic Age did not belong to the original scheme.

In the Greek Golden Age men lived like the gods under the rule of Kronos; they never suffered the ills of old age, nor lost their strength; they feasted continually,



and enjoyed peace and security. The whole world prospered. When this race passed away they became beneficent spirits who watched over mankind and distributed riches.

In the Silver Age mankind were inferior; children were reared up for a century, and died soon afterwards; sacrifice and worship was neglected. In the end Zeus, son of Kronos, destroyed the Silver Race.

In the Bronze Age mankind sprang from the ash. They were endowed with great strength, and worked in bronze and had bronze houses: iron was unknown. But Bronze Age men were takers of life, and at length Black Death removed them all to Hades.

Zeus created the fourth race, which was represented by the semi-divine heroes of a former generation; when they fell in battle on the plain of Troy and elsewhere, Zeus consigned them to the Islands of the Blest, where they were ruled over by Kronos. The fifth Age may originally have been the fourth. As much is suggested by another Hesiodic legend which sets forth that all mankind are descended from two survivors of the Flood at the close of the Bronze Age.

In *Le Cycle Mythologique Irlandais et la Mythologie Celtique*, the late Professor D'Arbois de Jubainville has shown that these Ages are also a feature of Celtic (Irish) mythology. Their order, however, differs from those in Greek, but it is of special interest to note that they are arranged in exactly the same colour order as those given in the *Mahābhārata*. The first Celtic Age is that of Partholon, which de Jubainville identified with the Silver Age (white); the second is Nemed's, the Bronze Age (red); the third is the Tuatha de Danann, the Golden Age (yellow); and the fourth is the Age of the dark Milesians, called after their divine ancestor Mile, son of



Beli, the god of night and death. The Irish claim descent from the Milesians.

Professor D'Arbois de Jubainville considered that the differences between the Irish and Greek versions of the ancient doctrine were due in part to the developments which Irish legend received after the introduction of Christianity. There are, however, he showed, striking affinities. The Tuatha de Danann, for instance, like the "Golden Race" of the Greeks, became invisible, and shared the dominion of the world with men, "sometimes coming to help them, sometimes disputing with them the pleasures of life".

Like the early Christian annalists of Ireland, the Indian Brahmans appear to have utilized the legends which were afloat among the people. Both in the Greek and Celtic (Irish) myths the people of the Silver Age are distinguished for their folly; in the Indian Silver or White Age the people were so perfect and holy that it was not necessary for them to perform religious ceremonies; they simply uttered the mystic word "Om".<sup>1</sup>

There are many interesting points of resemblance between certain of the Irish and Indian legends. We are informed, for instance, of the Celtic St. Finnen, who fasted like a Brahman, so to compel a pagan sage, Tuan MacCarell, to reveal the ancient history of Ireland. Tuan had lived all through the various mythical Ages; his father was the brother of Partholon, king of the "Silver Race". At the end of the First Age, Tuan was a "long-haired, grey, naked, and miserable old man". One evening he fell asleep, and when he woke up he rejoiced to find that he had become a young stag. He saw the people of Nemed (the Bronze or Red Race) arriving in Ireland; he saw them passing away. Then he was trans-

<sup>1</sup> "Om" originally referred to the three Vedas; afterwards it signified the Trinity.



formed into a black boar; afterwards he was a vulture, and in the end he became a fish. When he had existed as a fish for twenty years he was caught by a fisherman. The queen had Tuan for herself, and ate his fish form, with the result that she gave birth to the sage as her son.

In similar manner Bata of the Egyptian Anpu-Bata story,<sup>1</sup> after existing as a blossom, a bull, and a tree, became the son of his unfaithful wife, who swallowed a chip of wood.

Tuan MacCarell assured St. Finnen, "in the presence of witnesses", as we are naively informed, that he remembered all that happened in Ireland during the period of 1500 years covered by his various incarnations.

Another, and apparently a later version of the legend, credits the Irish sage, the fair Fintan, son of Bochra, with having lived for 5550 years before the Deluge, and 5500 years after it. He fled to Ireland with the followers of Cesara, granddaughter of Noah, to escape the flood. Fintan, however, was the only survivor, and, according to Irish chronology, he did not die until the sixth century of the present era.

One of the long-lived Indian sages was named Markandeya. In the *Vana Parva* section of the *Mahābhārata* he visits the exiled Pandava brethren in a forest, and is addressed as "the great Muni, who has seen many thousands of ages passing away. In this world", says the chief exile, "there is no man who hath lived so long as thou hast. . . . Thou didst adore the Supreme Deity when the Universe was dissolved, and the world was without a firmament, and there were no gods and no demons. Thou didst behold the re-creation of the four orders of beings when the winds were restored to their places and the waters were consigned to their proper

<sup>1</sup> See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.



place. . . . Neither death nor old age which causeth the body to decay have any power over thee."

Markandeya, who has full knowledge of the Past, the Present, and the Future, informs the exiles that the Supreme Being is "great, incomprehensible, wonderful, and immaculate, without beginning and without end. . . . He is the Creator of all, but is himself Increate, and is the cause of all power."<sup>1</sup>

After the Universe is dissolved, all Creation is renewed, and the cycle of the four Ages begins again with Krita Yuga. "A cycle of the Yugas comprises twelve thousand divine years. A full thousand of such cycles constitutes a Day of Brahma." At the end of each Day of Brahma comes "Universal Destruction".

Markandeya goes on to say that the world grows extremely sinful at the close of the last Kali Yuga of the Day of Brahma. Brahmans abstain from prayer and meditation, and Sudras take their place. Kshatriyas and Vaisyas forget the duties of their castes; all men degenerate and beasts of prey increase. The earth is ravaged by fire, cows give little milk, fruit trees no longer blossom, Indra sends no rain; the world of men becomes filled with sin and immorality. . . . Then the earth is swept by fire, and heavy rains fall until the forests and mountains are covered over by the rising flood. All the winds pass away; they are absorbed by the Lotus floating on the breast of the waters, in which the Creator sleeps; the whole Universe is a dark expanse of water.

Although even the gods and demons have been destroyed at the eventide of the last Yuga, Markandeya survives. He wanders over the face of the desolate waters and becomes weary, but is unable to find a resting-place. At length he perceives a banyan tree; on one of

<sup>1</sup> Roy's translation.



its boughs is a Celestial bed, and sitting on the bed is a beautiful boy whose face is as fair as a full-blown lotus. The boy speaks and says; "O Markandeya, I know that thou art weary. . . . Enter my body and secure repose. I am well pleased with thee."

Markandeya enters the boy's mouth and is swallowed. In the stomach of the Divine One the sage beholds the whole earth (that is, India) with its cities and kingdoms, its rivers and forests, and its mountains and plains; he sees also the gods and demons, mankind and the beasts of prey, birds and fishes and insects. . . .

The sage related that he shook with fear when he beheld these wonders, and desired the protection of the Supreme Being, whereat he was ejected from the boy's mouth, and found himself once again on the branch of the banyan tree in the midst of the wide expanse of dark waters.

Markandeya was then informed by the Lord of All regarding the mysteries which he had beheld. The Divine One spoke saying: "I have called the waters 'Nara', and because they were my 'Ayana', or home, I am Narayana, the source of all things, the Eternal, the Unchangeable. I am the Creator of all things, and the Destroyer of all things. . . . I am all the gods. . . . Fire is my mouth, the earth is my feet, and the sun and the moon are my eyes; the Heaven is the crown of my head, and the cardinal points are my ears; the waters are born of my sweat. Space with the cardinal points are my body, and the Air is in my mind."<sup>1</sup>

The Creator continues, addressing Markandeya: "I am the wind, I am the Sun, I am Fire. The stars are the pores of my skin, the ocean is my robe, my bed and

<sup>1</sup> Roy's translation. This conception of the World God resembles the Egyptian Ptah and Ra. See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.



my dwelling-place. . . . ” The Divine One is the source of good and evil: “Lust, wrath, joy, fear, and the overclouding of the intellect, are all different forms of me. . . . Men wander within my body, their senses are overwhelmed by me. . . . They move not according to their own will, but as they are moved by me.”

Markandeya then related that the Divine Being said: “I create myself into new forms. I take my birth in the families of virtuous men. . . . I create gods and men, and Gandharvas and Rakshas and all immobile beings, and then destroy them all myself (when the time cometh) For the preservation of rectitude and morality, I assume a human form; and when the season for action cometh, I again assume forms that are inconceivable. In the Krita Age I become white, in the Treta Age I become yellow, in the Dwāpara I become red, and in the Kali Age I become dark in hue. . . . And when the end cometh, assuming the fierce form of Death, alone I destroy all the three worlds with their mobile and immobile existences. . . . Alone do I set agoing the wheel of Time: I am formless: I am the Destroyer of all creatures: and I am the cause of all efforts of all my creatures.”<sup>1</sup>

Markandeya afterwards witnessed “the varied and wondrous creation starting into life”.

The theory of Metempsychosis, or Transmigration of Souls, is generally regarded as being of post-Vedic growth in India as an orthodox doctrine. Still, it remains an open question whether it was not professed from the earliest times by a section of the various peoples who entered the Punjab at different periods and in various stages of culture. We have already seen that the burial customs differed. Some consigned the dead hero to the “House of Clay”, invoking the earth to shroud him as a mother

<sup>1</sup> *Mahabharata, Vana Parva*, section clxxxix, P. C. Roy's translation.



who covers her son with her robe, and the belief ultimately prevailed that Yama, the first man, had discovered the path leading to Paradise, which became known as the "Land of the Fathers" (Pitris). The fire worshippers, who identified Agni with the "vital spark", cremated the dead, believing that the soul passed to heaven like the burnt offering, which was the food of the gods. It is apparent, therefore, that in early times sharp differences of opinion existed among the tribes regarding the destiny of the soul. Other unsung beliefs may have obtained ere the Brahmans grew powerful and systematized an orthodox creed. The doctrine of Metempsychosis may have had its ancient adherents, although these were not at first very numerous. In one passage of the *Rigveda* "the soul is spoken of as departing to the waters or the plants", and it "may", says Professor Macdonell, "contain the germs of the theory" of Transmigration of Souls.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine of Metempsychosis was believed in by the Greeks and the Celts. According to Herodotus the former borrowed it from Egypt, and although some have cast doubt on the existence of the theory in Egypt, there are evidences that it obtained there as in early Aryanized India among sections of the people.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the doctrine is traceable to a remote racial influence regarding which no direct evidence survives.

All that we know definitely regarding the definite acceptance of the theory in India is that in *Satapatha Brahmana* it is pointedly referred to as a necessary element of orthodox religion. The teacher declares that those who perform sacrificial rites are born again and attain to immortality, while those who neglect to sacrifice pass through successive existences until Death ultimately claims them.

<sup>1</sup> *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> See *Egyptian Myth and Legend*.



According to Upanishadic belief the successive rebirths in the world are forms of punishment for sins committed, or a course of preparation for the highest state of existence.

In the code of Manu it is laid down, for instance, that he who steals gold becomes a rat, he who steals uncooked food a hedgehog, he who steals honey a stinging insect; a murderer may become a tiger, or have to pass through successive states of existence as a camel, a dog, a pig, a goat, &c.; other wrongdoers may have to exist as grass, trees, worms, snails, &c. As soon as a man died, it was believed that he was reborn as a child, or a reptile, as the case might be. Sufferings endured by the living were believed to be retribution for sins committed in a former life.

Another form of this belief had evidently some connection with lunar worship, or, at any rate, with the recognition of the influence exercised by the moon over life in all its phases; it is declared in the *Upanishads* that "all who leave this world go directly to the moon. By their lives its waxing crescent is increased, and by means of its waning it brings them to a second birth. But the moon is also the gate of the heavenly world, and he who can answer the questions of the moon is allowed to pass beyond it. He who can give no answer is turned to rain by the moon and rained down upon the earth. He is born again here below, as worm or fly, or fish or bird, or lion, or boar or animal with teeth, or tiger, or man, or anything else in one or another place, according to his works and his knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

Belief in Metempsychosis ultimately prevailed all over India, and it is fully accepted by Hinduism in our own day. Brahmans now teach that the destiny of the soul depends on the mental attitude of the dying person: if

<sup>1</sup> Paul Deussen's translation.



his thoughts are centred on Brahma he enters the state of everlasting bliss, being absorbed in the World Soul; if, however, he should happen to think of a favourite animal or a human friend, the soul will be reborn as a cow, a horse, or a dog, or it may enter the body of a newly-born child and be destined to endure once again the ills that flesh is heir to.

In Egypt, according to Herodotus, the adherents of the Transmigration theory believed that the soul passed through many states of existence, until after a period of about three thousand years it once again reanimated the mummy. The Greeks similarly taught that "the soul continues its journey, alternating between a separate, unrestrained existence and fresh reincarnation, round the wide circle of necessity, as the companion of many bodies of men and animals".<sup>1</sup> According to Cæsar, the Gauls professed the doctrine of Metempsychosis quite freely.<sup>2</sup>

Both in India and in Egypt the ancient doctrine of Metempsychosis was coloured by the theologies of the various cults which had accepted it. It has survived, however, in primitive form in the folk tales. Apparently the early exponents of the doctrine took no account of beginning or end; they simply recognized "the wide circle of necessity" round which the soul wandered, just as the worshippers of primitive nature gods and goddesses recognized the eternity of matter by symbolizing earth, air, and heaven as deities long ere they had conceived of a single act of creation.

<sup>1</sup> *Psyche*, Erwin Rhode.

<sup>2</sup> *De Bello Gallico*, vi, xiv, 4.



## CHAPTER VII

### New Faiths: Vishnu Religion, Buddhism, and Jainism

Religious Ages—Influence of the Upanishads—The Inspiration of Great Teachers—Conception of a Supreme Personal God—Rise of Vishnu and Shiva Cults—Krishna a Human Incarnation of Vishnu—The Bhagavad-gita—Salvation by Knowledge—Buddha's Revolt against Brahmanism—His Gloomy Message to Mankind—Spread of Buddhism—Jainism—Revival of Brahmanism—The Puranas—Incarnations of Vishnu—Creator as a Boar—Egyptian and European Conceptions and Customs—Jagganath—Kalki.

MODERN-DAY Brahman pundits, the cultured apostles of the ancient forest sages, acknowledge a Trinity composed of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. A rock carving at Elephanta, which depicts the supreme god with three heads, indicates that the conception is of considerable antiquity. To what particular period it must be assigned, however, we cannot yet definitely decide.

The religious history of India is divided into four Ages: (1) the Vedic Age; (2) the Brahmanical Age; (3) the Buddhist Age; and (4) the Age of the reform and revival of Brahmanism.

As we have seen, many gods were worshipped in the Vedic Age, but ere it had ended Pantheistic ideas found expression in the hymns. Two distinct currents of thought characterize the Brahmanical Age. On the one hand there was the growth of priestly influence which is

the feature of the *Brahmanas*, and on the other the development of the bold Pantheism of the *Upanishads*, which are permeated with a catholicity of spirit directly opposed to narrow and pedantic ritualism. Towards the close of this Age, Vishnu and Shiva were deities of growing ascendancy.

The Buddhist Age began in the sixth century before Christ, and Buddhism gradually supplanted Brahmanism as a national religion. In the tenth century of our era, however, Brahmanism was revived, drawing its inspiration mainly from the *Upanishads*, and purified by the teachings of Buddha and other reformers.

These religious movements of the post-Vedic times, which have exercised a cumulative influence in shaping modern-day Hinduism, were due directly and indirectly to the speculative reasonings of the unknown authors of the *Upanishads*. The Pantheistic doctrines of these ancient philosophers, however, hardly constituted a religion: they were rather an esoteric system of belief devoid of popular appeal. But they have been the inspiration of a succession of profound thinkers and eloquent teachers of revered memory in India, who infused ancient modes of thought with high philosophic doctrines, and utilized archaic myths to develop a religion which in its purest form permeates the acts of everyday life and requires the whole-hearted devotion and service of pious Hindus to the will of the Supreme Being.

In the Brahmanical Age Upanishadic teachings made limited appeal, but evidences are not wanting that knowledge of them was not confined to the Brahmans, because the revolts which gave India Buddhism and Jainism originated among the Kshatriyas. Meanwhile the gods of the *Vedas* continued their hold upon the allegiance of the great masses of the people, although the ancient Vedic









religion had been divested of its simplicity and directness by the ritualistic priesthood. Gods and men depended upon the Brahmans for their prosperity and even for their continued existence. It was taught that "the gods lived in fear of death, the strong Ender", but were supported and fed by penance and sacrifice. The priests achieved spiritual dominion over their rivals, the Kshatriyas.

There was, however, more than one "school of thought" among the Brahmans. The sages who memorized and repeated the older Upanishads, and composed new ones, could not have failed to pass unrecorded judgments on the superstitious practices of their ritualistic brethren. Account must also be taken of the example and teachings of the bands of wandering devotees, the Bhiksus, who neither performed penances nor offered up sacrifices, and of the influence exercised by the independent thinkers among the Kshatriyas, who regarded with disfavour the pretensions of the powerful priesthood. The elements of revolt could never have been absent during the two centuries of the Brahmanical Age. Upanishadic teachings had stirred the minds of thinking men, but they had one marked defect; they left unsatisfied the religious sense which could find no repose in a jungle of abstract thought. It was impossible, however, for the leaders of thought to return to the polytheism of the Vedic Age, or to worship deities controlled by human beings. A new and higher religion became a necessity for those who, like the Hebrew Psalmist, appear to have cried:

"O Lord . . . thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit."—*Psalms*, li, 16, 17.

At any rate, we find that, before the Brahmanical Age



had ended, the conception was becoming more prevalent of a supreme personal god, greater than Indra or Agni, and worthy of minds influenced by the *Upanishads*—a god who was the embodiment of the First Cause, an Infinite Being uncontrolled by the priesthood. One section of the people appears to have worshipped Vishnu as the Celestial incarnation of the World Soul, while another gave recognition to Shiva. In the absence of records, however, it is impossible to ascertain to what extent monotheistic ideas were developed by unorthodox teachers. The new doctrines may have degenerated, like Buddhism, as they became widespread. It is evident, however, that the priesthood were unable to ignore them, for they are referred to in their “books”.

Although the political prominence of Vishnu and Shiva belong to the Age of reformed Brahmanism, it is undoubted that both deities were worshipped throughout the long period of Buddhistic ascendancy. The Greek ambassador Megasthenes, who resided in India between B.C. 311 and 302, and wrote *Ta Indika*, furnishes interesting evidence in this connection. “By his description of the god Dionysus, whom they worshipped in the mountains, Shiva”, says Professor Macdonell, “must be intended, and by Herakles, adored in the plains . . . no other can be meant than Vishnu and his incarnation Krishna. . . . These statements seem to justify the conclusion that Shiva and Vishnu were already prominent as highest gods, the former in the mountains, the latter in the Ganges valley. . . . We also learn from Megasthenes that the doctrine of the four Ages of the World (Yugas) was fully developed in India by this time.”<sup>1</sup>

In the *Rigveda* Vishnu is a god of grace. He is, however, a secondary deity—an attribute of the sun and

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 411.



a phase of Agni. From the earliest times, it is significant to note, his benevolent character is emphasized. In one of the hymns<sup>1</sup> he is called "the Kinsman"; he welcomed to his heaven of bliss the faithful worshippers of the gods. An interesting reference is made to his "highest step". As detailed in later writings, the myth involved is to the effect that the demon Bali, one of the dreaded Danavas (Titans), had, in the Treta Yuga, secured temporary ascendancy over the gods. Vishnu appeared before him in the form of the dwarf Vamana, and requested as much territory as he could measure out by taking three strides. The demon granted this request, and Vishnu immediately assumed the form of a giant; his first step covered the heavens, the second crossed the entire earth, and the third and highest reached the abode of the gods. So was the Universe won back from the Asuras. It is believed that the myth refers to the progress of the conquering sun by day and by night.

In *Yajurveda* Vishnu is more prominent than in the *Rigveda*, and in the *Brahmanas* "there is a growing tendency", remarks Professor Barnett, "to regard him as a blessed Cosmic Spirit".<sup>2</sup> He is fully identified with Brahma in the *Mahābhārata*. In some of the myths he is the source of Indra's strength and valour, and he appears to have absorbed the sublime character of Varuna, the god of sinners; he is similarly associated with the sea, but the Sea of Milk.

Shiva is a development of the Vedic storm god Rudra, who was not only dreaded, but also revered as a destroyer of evil-doers, hatred, evil, and disease, and as a nourisher who gave long life.<sup>3</sup>

Both deities inspired love and reverential fear; they

<sup>1</sup> *Rigveda*, i, 154, 155.

<sup>2</sup> *Hinduism*, by L. D. Barnett.

<sup>3</sup> *Rigveda*, ii, 33.



won the affections of human hearts and were worshipped emotionally. Their cults have had independent doctrinal development, however, and they divide Hinduism to-day into two great churches, one of which recognizes Vishnu, and the other Shiva, as the greatest god. Their union in the Trinity has not yet obliterated sectarian differences.

Many myths have collected round Vishnu, originally a purely abstract deity, because the faith which he represents had to be imparted to the masses in "parables". These "parables" were, of course, given literal interpretation by the people. The majority of the myths belong to the post-Buddhist Age—the Age of Brahmanical revival, during which came into existence the sacred poems called the *Puranas*. Many were also incorporated in the great epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Ramāyana*, which existed in part, at least, before the rise of Buddhism and Jainism.

When Vishnu, the god of mercy and goodness, received recognition as Narayana in the Brahmanical Age, he was worshipped as the "unconquerable preserver" who at the dawn of each Yuga (Age) awoke as the child of the primordial waters. In one myth he rises from a lotus bloom; in another he is supposed to sleep, as Brahma, on the coils of the world-serpent Shesha, which is "a part of a part of Vishnu". This serpent rests on the tortoise, Kurma, another form of Vishnu. When the tortoise moves its limbs, Shesha is roused to yawn; thus are earthquakes caused. A creation myth which teaches the absolute supremacy of Vishnu tells that at the beginning Brahma sprang from a lotus issuing from the navel of the Preserver, while Shiva came from his forehead.

Vishnu is a dark god with four arms; in one of his right hands he holds a warshell, and in the other a





VISHNU UPHOLDING THE UNIVERSE

*From a sculpture at Mammallapuram*





flaming discus, which destroys enemies and returns after it is flung; in one left hand he holds a mace, and in the other a lotus bloom.

The belief that the Supreme Being from time to time "assumes a human form . . . for the preservation of rectitude and morality" is an outstanding feature of Vishnuite religion, which teaches that Vishnu was born among men as Ramachandra, Krishna, Balarama, and Buddha. These are the Avataras of the Preserver. Avatara means literally "a descent", but is used in the sense of an "Incarnation".

Rama Chandra is the hero of the *Ramáyana* epic, which is summarized in our closing chapters; he is the human ideal of devotion, righteousness, and manliness, the slayer of the demon Ravana, who oppressed and persecuted mankind.

Krishna and his brother Balarama figure as princes of Dwaraka in the *Mahábhárata*. Krishna is represented as the teacher of the Vishnuite faith, the devotional religion which displaced the Vedic ceremonies and links Upanishadic doctrines with modern Hinduism. It recognizes that all men are sinful, and preaches salvation by Knowledge which embraces Works. Sinners must surrender themselves to Krishna, the human incarnation (Avatara) of Vishnu, the Preserver, the God of Love.

This faith is unfolded in the famous *Bhagavad-gita*<sup>1</sup> in the *Bhishma Parva* section of the *Mahábhárata* epic. Krishna is acting as the counsellor and charioteer of the Pandava warrior Arjuna. Ere the first day's battle of the Great War begins, the human Avatara of Vishnu reveals himself to his friend as the Divine Being, and gives instruction as to how men may obtain salvation.

Krishna teaches that the soul is "unborn, un-

<sup>1</sup> The "Divine Song".



changeable, eternal, and ancient"; it is one with the Supreme Soul, Vishnu, the First Cause, the Source of All. The soul "is not slain when the body is slain"; it enters new bodies after each death, or else it secures emancipation from sin and suffering by being absorbed in the World Soul. . . . All souls have to go through a round of births. "On attaining to Me, however," says Krishna, "there is no rebirth."

Krishna gives Salvation to those who obtain "Knowledge of self or Brahma". . . . He says: "The one who hath devoted his Self (Soul) to abstraction, casting an equal eye everywhere, beholdeth his Self in all creatures, and all creatures in his Self. Unto him that beholdeth Me in everything and beholdeth everything in Me, I am never lost and he also is never lost in Me. He that worshippeth Me as abiding in all creatures, holding yet that All is One, is a devotee, and whatever mode of life he may lead, he liveth in Me. . . .

"Even if thou art the greatest sinner among all that are sinful, thou shalt yet cross over all transgressions by the raft of Knowledge". . . . Knowledge destroys all sins. It is obtained by devotees who, "casting off attachment, perform actions for attaining purity of Self, with the body, the mind, the understanding, and even the senses, free from desire". To such men "a sod, a stone, and gold are alike".

Krishna, as Vishnu, is thus revealed: "I am the productive cause of the entire Universe and also its destroyer. There is nothing else that is higher than myself. . . . I am Om (the Trinity) in all the Vedas, the sound in space, the manliness in man. I am the fragrant odour in earth, the splendour in fire, the life in all creatures, and penance in ascetics. . . . I am the thing to be known, the means by which everything is cleansed. . . . I am the soul



(self) seated in the heart of every being. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings. . . . I am the letter A (in the Sanskrit alphabet). . . . I am Death that seizeth all, and the source of all that is to be. . . . He that knoweth me as the Supreme Lord of the worlds, without birth and beginning . . . is free from all sins. . . . He who doeth everything for me, who hath me for his supreme object, who is freed from attachment, who is without enmity towards all beings, even he cometh to me. . . . He through whom the world is not troubled, and who is not troubled by the world, who is free from joy, wrath, fear, and anxieties, even he is dear to me."

To Arjuna Krishna says: "Exceedingly dear art thou to me. Therefore I will declare what is for thy benefit. Set thy heart on Me, become my devotee, sacrifice to me, bow down to me. Then shalt thou come to me. . . . Forsaking all (religious) duties, come to me as thy sole refuge. I will deliver thee from all sins. Do not grieve."

It is, however, added: "This is not to be declared by thee to one who practiseth no austerities, to one who is not a devotee, to one who never waiteth on a preceptor, nor yet to one who calumniateth Me."

Unbelievers are those who are devoid of knowledge. Krishna says: "One who hath no knowledge and no faith, whose mind is full of doubt, is lost. . . . Doers of evil, ignorant men, the worst of their species . . . do not resort to Me." . . . Such men "return to the path of the world that is subject to destruction". He denounces "persons of demoniac natures" because they are devoid of "purity, good conduct, and truth. . . . They say that the Universe is void of truth, of guiding principle and of ruler. . . . Depending on this view



these men of lost souls, of little intelligence and fierce deeds, these enemies of the world, are born for the destruction of the Universe." They "cherish boundless hopes, limited by death alone", and "covet to obtain unfairly hoards of wealth for the gratification of their desires"; they say, "This foe hath been slain by me—I will slay others. . . . I am lord, I am the enjoyer. . . . I am rich and of noble birth—who else is there that is like me? . . . I will make gifts, I will be merry. . . . Thus deluded by ignorance, tossed about by numerous thoughts, enveloped in the meshes of delusion, attached to the enjoyment of objects of desire, they sink into foul hell. . . . Threefold is the way to hell, ruinous to the Self (Soul), namely, lust, wrath, likewise avarice. . . . Freed from these three gates of darkness, a man works out his own welfare, and then repairs to the highest goal."<sup>1</sup>

Balarama is an incarnation of the world serpent Shesha. According to the legend, he and Krishna are the sons of Vasudeva and Devakī. It was revealed to Kansa, King of Mat'hurā<sup>2</sup>, who was a worshipper of Shiva, that a son of Devakī would slay him. His majesty therefore commanded that Devakī's children should be slain as soon as they were born. Balarama, who was fair, was carried safely away. Krishna, the dark son, performed miracles soon after birth. The king had his father and mother fettered, and the doors of the houses were secured with locks. But the chains fell from Vasudeva, and the doors flew open when he stole out into the night to conceal the babe. As he crossed the river Jumna, carrying Krishna on his head in a basket, the waters rose high and threatened to drown him, but the child put out a foot and the river immediately fell and

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from Roy's translation of *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>2</sup> Or Muttra.





22

KRISHNA AND THE GOPIS (HERDSMAIDS)

*From a modern sculpture*





became shallow. In Mathura the two brothers performed miraculous feats during their youth. Indeed, the myths connected with them suggest that their prototypes were voluptuous pastoral gods. Krishna, the flute-player and dancer, is the shepherd lover of the Gopis or herdsmaids, his favourite being Radhá. He was opposed to the worship of Indra, and taught the people to make offerings to a sacred mountain.

King Kansa had resort to many stratagems to accomplish the death of Krishna, but his own doom could not be set aside; ultimately he was slain by the two brothers. The *Harivamsa*, an appendix to the *Mahábhárata*, which is as long as the Iliad and the Odyssey together, is devoted to the life and adventures of Krishna, who also figures in the *Puranas*.

Vishnu's Buddha Avatara was assumed, according to orthodox teaching, to bring about the destruction of demons and wicked men who refused to acknowledge the inspiration of the Vedas and the existence of deities, and were opposed to the caste system. This attitude was assumed by the Brahmans because Buddhism was a serious lay revolt against Brahmanical doctrines and ceremonial practices.

Buddha, "the Enlightened", was Prince Siddartha of the royal family Gautama, which, as elsewhere told, ruled over a Sakya tribe. At his birth marvellous signs foretold his greatness. Reared in luxury, he was kept apart from the common people; but when the time of his awakening came, he was greatly saddened to behold human beings suffering from disease, sorrow, and old age. One night he left his wife and child, and went away to live the life of a contemplative hermit in the forest, with purpose to find a solution for the great problem of human sin and suffering. He came under



the influence of Upanishadic doctrines, and at the end of six years he returned and began his mission.

Buddha, the great psychologist, was one of the world's influential teachers, because his doctrines have been embraced in varying degrees of purity by about a third of the human race. Yet they are cold and unsatisfying and gloomy. The "Enlightener's" outlook on life was intensely timid and pessimistic; he was an "enemy of society" in the sense that he made no attempt to effect social reforms so as to minimize human suffering, which touched him with deepest sympathy, but unfortunately filled him with despair; his solution for all problems was Death; he was the apostle of benevolent Nihilism and Idealistic Atheism.

There is no supreme personal god in Buddhism and no hope of immortality. Gods and demons and human beings are "living creatures"; gods have no power over the Universe, and need not be worshipped or sacrificed to, because they are governed by laws, and men have nothing to fear from them.

Buddha denied the existence of the Self-Soul of the *Upanishads*. Self is not God, in the sense that it is a phase of the World Soul. The "self-state" is, according to the "Enlightener", a combination of five elements—matter, feeling, imagination, will, and consciousness; these are united by Karma,<sup>1</sup> the influence which causes life to repeat itself. Buddha had accepted, in a limited sense, the theory of Transmigration of Souls. He taught, however, that rebirth was the result of actions and desire. "It is the yearning for existence", he said, "which leads from new birth to new birth, which finds its desire in different directions, the desire for pleasure, the desire for existence, the desire for power." Death occurs when

<sup>1</sup> Karma, "works" and their consequences.





BUDDHA EXPOUNDING THE LAW





the five elements which constitute life are divided; after death nothing remains but the consequences of actions and thoughts. Rebirth follows because "the yearning", the essence of "works", brings the elements together again. The individual exists happily, or the reverse, according to his conduct in a former life; sorrow and disease are results of wrong living and wrong thinking in previous states of existence.

The aim of the Buddhist is to become the "master of his fate". Life to him is hateful because, as the Enlightener taught, "birth is suffering, death is suffering; to be joined to one thou dost not love is suffering, to be divided from thy love is suffering, to fail in thy desire is suffering; in short, the fivefold bonds that unite us to earth—those of the five elements—are suffering". As there can be no life without suffering in various degrees, it behoves the believer to secure complete emancipation from the fate of being reborn. Life is a dismal and tragic failure. The Buddhist must therefore destroy the influence which unites the five elements and forms another life. He must achieve the complete elimination of inclination—of the yearning for existence. Buddha's "sacred truth", which secures the desired end, is eight-fold—"right belief, right resolve, right speech, right action, right life, right desire, right thought, and right self-absorption". The reward of the faithful, who attains to perfect knowledge, unsullied by works, is eternal emancipation by *Nirvana*, undisturbed repose or blissful extinction<sup>1</sup>, which is the Supreme Good. If there had been no belief in rebirth, the solution would have been found in suicide.

<sup>1</sup> Buddha's negative attitude towards immortality and the conception of a Supreme Being was departed from by those of his followers who have taught that *Nirvana* is a conscious state of eternal bliss.



Buddha taught that the four Noble Verities are: (1) pain, (2) desire, the cause of pain, (3) pain is extinguished by Nirvana, (4) the way which leads to Nirvana. The obliteration of Desire is the first aim of the Buddhist. This involves the renunciation of the world and of all evil passions; the believer must live a perfect life according to the Buddhist moral code, which is as strict as it is idealistic in the extreme. "It does not express friendship, or the feeling of particular affection which a man has for one or more of his fellow creatures, but that universal feeling which inspires us with goodwill towards all men and constant willingness to help them."<sup>1</sup>

Belief in the sanctity of life is a prevailing note in Buddhism. The teacher forbade the sacrifice of animals, as did Isaiah in Judah.

"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats." *Isaiah, i, 11.*

Brahmanism was influenced in this regard, for offerings to Vishnu were confined to cakes, curds, sweetmeats, flowers, oblations, &c.

Buddha, the enemy of the priesthood, was of the Kshatriya caste, and his religion appears to have appealed to aristocrats satiated with a luxurious and idle life, who felt like the Preacher that "all is vanity"; it also found numerous adherents among the wandering bands of unorthodox devotees. The perfect Buddhist had to live apart from the world, and engage for long intervals in introspective contemplation so as to cultivate by a stern analytic process that frame of mind which enabled him to obliterate Desire blankly and coldly. Familiar statues of Buddha

<sup>1</sup> Burnouf, quoted by Max Muller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, i, 222.



show the posture which must be assumed; the legs are crossed and twisted, and the hands arranged to suggest inaction; the eyes gaze on the bridge of the nose.

Monastic orders came into existence for men and women, but the status of women was not raised. From these orders were excluded all officials and the victims of infectious and incurable diseases. A lower class of Buddhists engaged in worldly duties. Although Buddha recognized the caste system, his teaching removed its worst features, for Kshatriyas and converted Brahmans could accept food from the Sudras without fear of contamination. Kings embraced the new religion, which ultimately assumed a national character.

Missionaries were from the earliest times sent abroad, and Buddhism spread into Burma, Siam, Anam, Tibet, Mongolia, China, Java, and Japan. The view is suggested that its influence can be traced in Egypt. "From some source," writes Professor Flinders Petrie, "perhaps the Buddhist mission of Asoka, the ascetic life of recluses was established in the Ptolemaic times, and monks of the Serapeum illustrated an ideal to man which had been as yet unknown in the West. This system of monasticism continued until Pachomios, a monk of Serapis in Upper Egypt, became the first Christian monk in the reign of Constantine."<sup>1</sup>

Jainism, like Buddhism, was also a revolt against Brahmanic orthodoxy, and drew its teachers and disciples chiefly from the aristocratic class. It was similarly influenced in its origin by the *Upanishads*. Jainites believe, however, in soul and the world soul; they recognize the Hindu deities, but only as exalted souls in a state of temporary bliss achieved by their virtues; they also worship a number of "conquerors" or "openers of the way",

<sup>1</sup> Petrie, *The Religion of Egypt*, pp. 92-3.



as Buddhism, in debased form, recognizes Buddha and his disciples as gods, and allows the worship here of a tooth and there of a hair of the Enlightener, as well as sacred mounds connected with his pilgrimages. In the gloomy creed of the Jainites it is taught that "emancipation" may be hastened by rigid austerities which entail systematic starvation. Many Jainites have in their holy places given up their lives in this manner, but the practice is now obsolete.

In the Age which witnessed the decline of Buddhism in India, and the rise of reformed Brahmanism, the religious struggle was productive of the long poems called the *Puranas* (old tales) to which we have referred. In these productions some of the ancient myths about the gods were preserved and new myths were formulated. They were meant for popular instruction, and especially to make converts among the unlettered masses. Their authors were chiefly of the Vishnu cult, which had perpetuated the teachings of the unknown sages who at the close of the Brahmanical Age revolted against impersonal Pantheism, the ritualistic practices of the priesthood, and the popular conceptions regarding the Vedic deities who ensured worldly prosperity, but exercised little influence on the character of the individual.

Indra and Agni and other popular deities were not, however, excluded from the Pantheon, but were divested of their ancient splendour and shown to be subject to the sway of Brahma, their Lord and Creator, whose attributes they symbolized in their various spheres of activity. Vishnuites taught that Vishnu was Brahma, and Shivaïtes that Shiva was the supreme deity.

In this way, it would appear, the authors of the *Puranas* effected a compromise between immemorial beliefs and practices and the higher religious conceptions



towards which the people were being gradually elevated. A similar policy was adopted by Pope Gregory the Great, who in the year 601 caused the Archbishop of Canterbury to be instructed to infuse Pagan ceremonials with Christian symbolism. It was decreed that heathen temples should be changed into churches, and days consecrated to sacrificial ceremonies to be observed as Christian festivals. The Anglo-Saxons were not to be permitted to "sacrifice animals to the Devil", but to kill them for human consumption "to the praise of God", so that "while they retained some outward joys they might give more ready response to inward joys". The Pope added: "It is not possible to cut off everything at once from obdurate minds; he who endeavours to climb to the highest place must rise not by bounds, but by degrees or steps."<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary for us, therefore, in dealing with Puranic beliefs, and the movement which culminated in modern-day Hinduism, to make a distinction between the popular faith and the beliefs of the most enlightened Brahmans, and also between the process of mythology-making and the development of religious ideas.

In early Puranic times, when Brahmanism was revived, Vishnu's benevolent character was exalted to so high a degree that, it was taught, even demons might secure salvation through his grace. Prahlada, son of the King of the Danavas, worshipped Vishnu. As a consequence, terrible punishments were inflicted upon him by his angry father. At length Vishnu appeared in the Danava palace as the Nrisinha incarnation (half man, half lion), and slew the presumptuous giant king who had aspired to control the Universe.

Another incarnation of Vishnu was the boar, Varáha. A demon named Hiranyaksha had claimed the earth,

<sup>1</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, lib. i, chap. xxx.



when at the beginning of one of the Yugas it was raised from the primordial deep by the Creator in the form of a boar. Vishnu slew the demon for the benefit of the human race. Earlier forms of this myth recognize Brahma, or Prajapati, as the boar. In *Taittiriya Brahmana* it is set forth: "This Universe was formerly water, fluid; with that (water) Prajapati practised arduous devotions (saying), 'How shall this universe be (developed)?' He beheld a lotus leaf standing. He thought, 'There is something on which this rests.' He as a boar—having assumed that form—plunged beneath towards it. He found the earth down below. Breaking off (a portion of) her, he rose to the surface."

This treatment of the boar is of special interest. In Egypt the boar was the demon Set, and the "black pig" is the devil in Wales and Scotland, and also in a "layer" of Irish mythology. Hatred of pork prevailed in Egypt and its vicinity, and still lingers in parts of Ireland and Wales, but especially in the Scottish Highlands. The Gauls, like the Aryans of India, did not regard the boar as a demon, and they ate pork freely, as did also the Achæans and the Germanic peoples. Roast pig is provided in Valhal and in the Irish Danann Paradise, but the Irish "devil", Balor, who resembles the Asura king of India, had a herd of black pigs.

The struggle between Kshatriyas and Brahmans is reflected in Vishnu's incarnation as Parasu-rama (Rama with the axe). He clears the earth twenty-one times of the visible Kshatriyas, but on each occasion a few survive to perpetuate the caste.

Jagannath<sup>1</sup> is also regarded as a form of Vishnu, although apparently not of Brahmanic origin. He is represented by three forms, representing the dark Krishna,

<sup>1</sup> Juggernaut.





THE BOAR INCARNATION OF VISHNU RAISING THE EARTH  
FROM THE DEEP

*From a rock sculpture at Udayagiri*





the fair Balarama, and their sister, Subhadra. Once a year the idol is bathed and afterwards taken forth in a great car, which is dragged by pious worshippers. Some have considered it a meritorious act to commit suicide by being crushed under its wheels.

It is believed that Vishnu will yet appear as Kalki, riding on a white horse and grasping a flaming sword. He will slay the enemies of evil and re-establish pure religion. Many pious Vishnuites in our own day look forward to the coming of their supreme deity with fear and trembling, but not without inflexible faith.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Divinities of the Epic Period

The Great Indian Epics—Utilized by the Brahmans—The Story of Manu—Universal Cataclysm—How Amrita (Ambrosia) was obtained—Churning of the Ocean—The Demon Devourer of Sun and Moon—Garuda, the Man Eagle—Attributes of the God Shiva—Comparison with Irish Balor—Rise of the Goddesses—Saraswati and Lakshmi or Sri—Fierce Durga and Kali—Sati, the Ideal Hindu Wife—Legend of the Ganges—The Celestial Rishis—Vishwamitra and Vasishtha—History in the Vedas—Wars between Aryan Tribes—Kernel of Mahábhárata Epic.

THE history of Brahmanism during the Buddhist Age is enshrined in the great epics *Mahábhárata* and *Ramáyana*, which had their origin before B.C. 500, and continued to grow through the centuries.

The *Mahabharata*, which deals with the Great War for ascendancy between two families descended from King Bharata, has been aptly referred to as "the Iliad of India". It appears to have evolved from a cycle of popular hero songs, but after assuming epic form it was utilized by the Brahmans for purposes of religious propaganda. The warriors were represented as sons of gods or allies of demons, and the action of the original narrative was greatly hampered by inserting long speeches and discussions regarding Brahmanic conceptions and beliefs. An excellent example of this process is afforded by the famous *Bhagavad-gita*, from which we have quoted in the previous chapter. The narrative of the first day's battle is interrupted to allow Krishna to expound the



doctrines of the Vaishnava faith, with purpose to make converts to the cult of Vishnu. Almost every incident in the poem is utilized in a similar manner. In fact the epic, as we are informed in the opening section, "furnisheth the means of arriving at the knowledge of Brahma". The priests, with this aim in view, loaded the chariots of heroes with religious treatises, and transformed a tribal struggle for supremacy into a great holy war. If the *Iliad* survived to us only in Pope's translation, and our theologians had scattered through it, say, metrical renderings of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and a few representative theological works of rival sects, a fate similar to that which has befallen the *Mahabharata* would now overshadow the great Homeric masterpiece. The "Iliad of India" is a part of what may be called the Hindu Bible, which embraces the *Ramayana*, the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, &c.

The *Ramayana*, which is called "the Odyssey of India", because it deals with the wanderings and adventures of the exiled prince Rama, was utilized mainly by the cult of Vishnu, but both Vishnu and Shiva figure as great gods in the *Mahabharata*, and now one and anon the other is given first place.

If the documentary material, which is available in India for dealing with its ancient religious beliefs, were as scanty as those which survive to us from Ancient Egypt, comparisons might have been drawn between the Brahmanic cults and the priestly theorists of Heliopolis, Memphis, Sais, &c., and it might have been remarked of the one nation as of the other that its people clung to archaic beliefs long after new and higher religious conceptions obtained as tenets of orthodox religion. In India

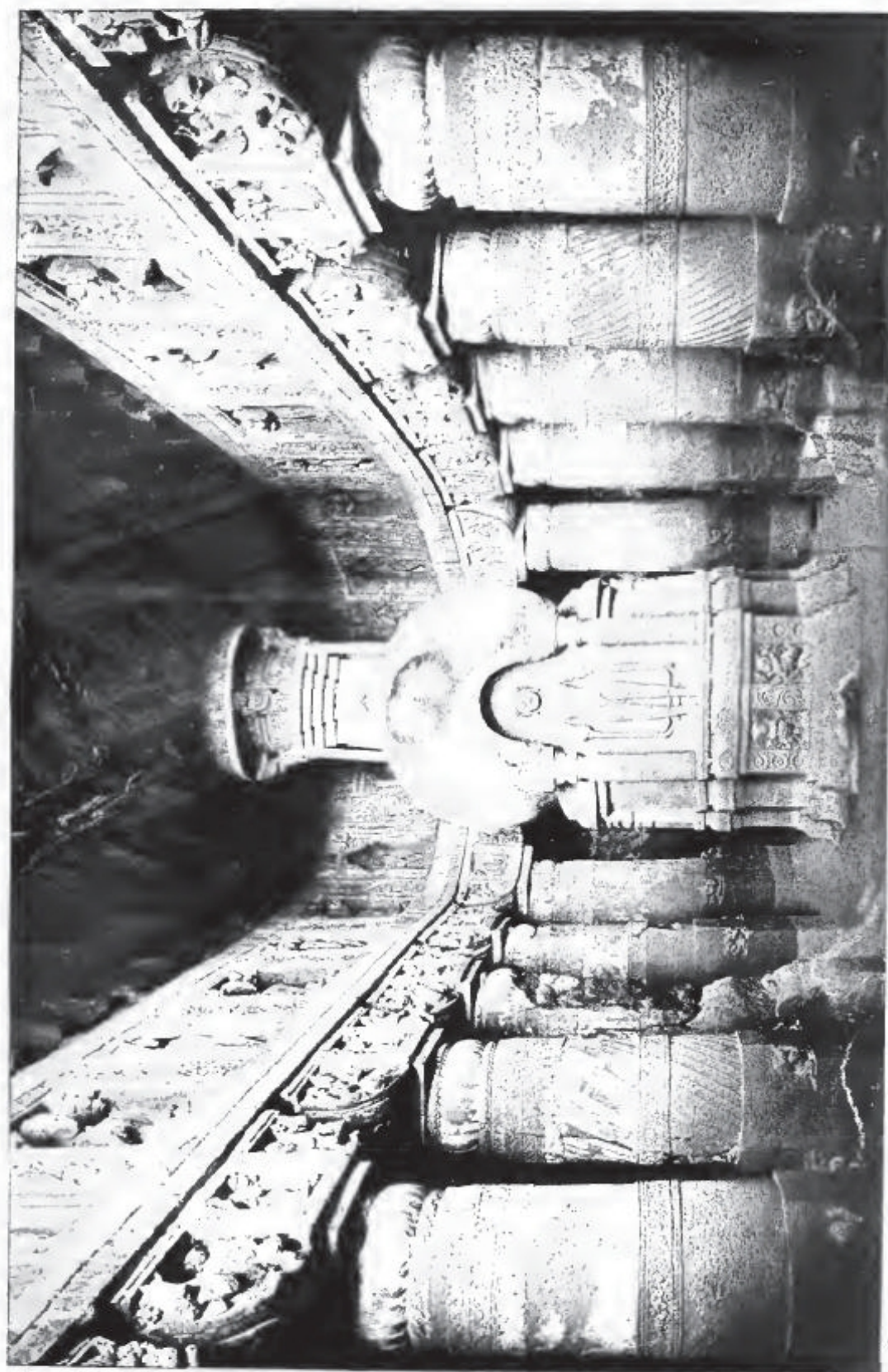


the process of change and development can, however, be not only traced, but partially accounted for, as we have shown. Old myths were embraced in the epics and the *Puranas* for the purpose of educating the people by effecting a compromise between folk religion and the profound doctrines of the ancient forest sages.

“Father Manu” of the *Vedas*, who appears to have been worshipped as a patriarchal ancestor, was, for instance, embraced in the *Mahābhārata* by the cult of Vishnu. He had been exalted by the ritualists as one who was greater than the gods, because he had been the first to inaugurate sacrificial rites, and he was afterwards associated with Brahma in performing some of the acts of Creation at the beginning of one of the Yugas (Ages). It was necessary, therefore, to show that he owed his power and opportunities to Vishnu.

In the *Mahābhārata* the sage Markandeya refers to Manu as the great Rishi, who was equal unto Brahma in glory. He had practised rigid austerities in a forest for ten thousand years, standing on one leg with uplifted hand. One day while he brooded in wet clothes, a fish rose from a stream and asked for his protection against the greater fish which desired to swallow it, at the same time promising to reward him. Manu placed the fish in an earthen jar and tended it carefully till it increased in size; then he put it in a tank. The fish continued to grow until the tank became small for it, and Manu heard it pleading to be transferred to the Ganges, “the favourite spouse of Ocean”. He carried it to the river, and in time the fish spoke to him, saying: “I cannot move about in the river on account of my great length and bulk. Take me quickly to the Ocean.” Manu was enabled to carry the fish from the Ganges to the sea, and then it spoke with a smile and said:





INTERIOR OF A ROCK-HEWN BUDDHIST TEMPLE (AJANTA)





"Know thou, O worshipful one, my protector, that the dissolution of the Universe is at hand. The time is ripe for purging the world. I will therefore advise thee what thou shouldst do, so that it may be well with thee. Build a strong and massive ark, and furnish it with a long rope; thou wilt ascend in it with the seven Rishis (the Celestial Rishis), and take with thee all the different seeds enumerated by Brahmans in days of yore, and preserve them carefully. Wait for me and I will appear as a horned animal. Act according to my instructions, for without mine aid thou canst not save thyself from the terrible deluge."

Manu gathered together all the different seeds and "set sail in an excellent vessel on the surging sea". He thought of the fish, and it arose out of the waters like an island; he cast a noose which he fastened to the horns on its head, and the fish towed the ark over the roaring sea; tossed by the billows the vessel reeled about like one who is drunk. No land was in sight. "There was water everywhere, and the waters covered the heaven and the firmament also. . . . When the world was thus flooded none but Manu, the seven Rishis, and the fish could be seen."

After many long years the vessel was towed to the highest peak of the Himavat, which is still called Nau-bandhana (the harbour), and it was made fast there. The fish then spoke and said: "I am Brahma, the Lord of all Creatures; there is none greater than me. I have saved thee from this cataclysm. Manu will create again all beings—gods, Asuras, and men, and all those divisions of creation which have the power of locomotion and which have it not. By practising severe austerities he will acquire this power. . . ."

Then Manu set about creating all beings in proper and exact order.<sup>1</sup>

Markandeya elsewhere described the universal cata-

<sup>1</sup> Condensed from *Vana Parva* section of *Mahābhārata*, sec. cxxxxvii, Roy's trans.



clysm with more detail. After a drought lasting for many years, seven blazing suns will appear in the firmament; they will drink up all the waters. Then wind-driven fire will sweep over the earth, consuming all things; penetrating to the nether world it will destroy what is there in a moment; it will burn up the Universe. Afterwards many-coloured and brilliant clouds will collect in the sky, looking like herds of elephants decked with wreaths of lightning. Suddenly they will burst asunder, and rain will fall incessantly for twelve years until the whole world with its mountains and forests is covered with water. The clouds will vanish. Then the Self-created Lord, the First Cause of everything, will absorb the winds and go to sleep. The Universe will become one dread expanse of water.

Account has to be taken of the persistent legend regarding the ambrosia which gave strength to the gods and prolonged their existence. In "Teutonic mythology" it is snatched by Odin from the giants of the Underworld, and is concealed in the moon, which is ever pursued by the demon wolf Managarm, who seeks to devour it.

The development of the Indian form of the myth is found in the story of "The Churning of the Ocean", which is dealt with in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Ramāyana*, and several of the *Puranas*.

According to the epics, the ambrosia, the Indian name of which is amrita (both words implying immortality), was required by the gods so as to enable them to overcome the demons. In *Vishnu Purva*, however, a Brahmanic addition to the myth was made so as to exalt a sage and illustrate the power he could exercise over the old Vedic deities. It is related that Durvāsas obtained from a merry nymph a sweet-scented, inspiring garland which made him dance. He presented it to Indra, who



placed it on the head of his elephant. The elephant then began to prance about, and grew so excited that it cast the garland on the ground. Durvāsas was enraged because that his gift was slighted in this manner, and cursed Indra and foretold the ruin of his kingdom. Thereafter the king of the gods began to suffer loss of power, whereat the other deities became alarmed, fearing that the demons would overcome him in battle. Appeal was made to Brahma, who referred the gods to Vishnu, the Preserver. That supreme being commanded that the ocean should be churned for amrita.

In the epics the gods allied themselves with the demons to procure amrita from Vishnu's Sea of Milk. The "churning stick" was the mountain Mandara, and the "churning rope" the serpent Vasuka<sup>1</sup> (Ananta or Shesha). Vishnu said: "The demons must share in the work of churning, but I will prevent them from tasting of the amrita, which must be kept for Indra and the gods only."

The gods carried the mountain Mandara to the ocean, and placed it on the back of Kurma, the king of tortoises, who was an incarnation of Vishnu.<sup>2</sup> Round the mountain they twisted the serpent, which was "a part of a part of Vishnu", the Asuras holding its hood and the gods its tail. As a result of the friction caused by the churning, masses of vapour issued from the serpent's mouth which, becoming clouds charged with lightning, poured down refreshing rains on the weary workers. Fire darted forth and enwrapped the mountain, burning its trees and destroying many birds, and the lions and elephants that crouched on its slopes. In time the Sea of Milk produced butter flavoured by the gums and juices which dropped from

<sup>1</sup> Va'suki.

<sup>2</sup> Brahma, as Prajapati, assumes, in one of the myths, the form of a tortoise to "create offspring".



the mountain. The gods grew weary, but Vishnu gave them fresh strength to proceed with the work. At length the moon emerged from the ocean; then arose the Apsaras, who became nymphs in Indra's heaven; they were followed by the goddess Lakshmi, Vishnu's white steed, and the gleaming gem which the god wears on his breast. Then came Dhanwantari, the physician of the gods, who carried a golden cup brimming with amrita. Beholding him, the Asuras cried out: "The gods have taken all else; the physician must be ours."

Next arose the great elephant Airāvata, which Indra took for himself. The churning still went on until the blue, devastating poison appeared and began to flow over the earth, blazing like a flame mixed with fumes. To save the world from destruction, Shiva swallowed the poison and held it in his throat. From that time he was called Nilakantha, "the blue-throated".

Meanwhile the demons desired to combat against the gods for the possession of the beautiful goddess Lakshmi and the amrita. But Vishnu assumed a bewitching female form, and so charmed the Asuras that they presented the amrita to that fair woman.

Vishnu immediately gave the amrita to the gods, but soon it was discovered that a demon named Rahu had assumed Celestial form with purpose to drink it. The amrita had only reached his throat when the sun and moon discovered him and informed Vishnu. The divine Preserver then flung his discus and cut off Rahu's huge head, which resembled a mountain peak. Rendered immortal by the amrita the head soared to the sky, roaring loud and long. From that day Rahu's head, with mouth agape, has followed sun and moon, and when he swallows one or the other he causes the eclipses.

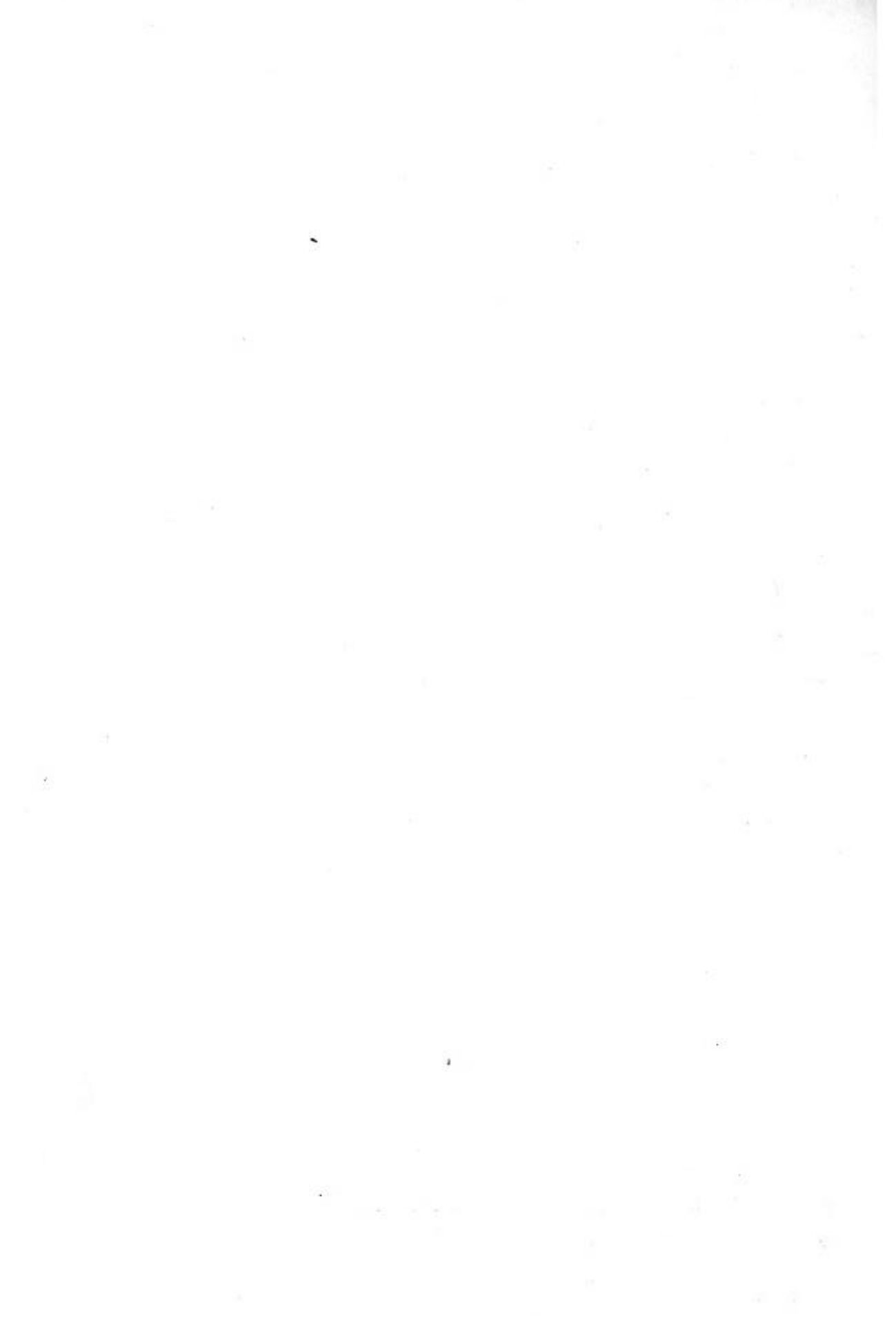
Meanwhile the demons fought against the gods, but





LAKSHMI ARISING FROM THE SEA OF MILK

*From a sculpture at Māmallapuram*





were defeated, although they flung rocks and mountains. Thousands were slain by the sky-scouring discus of Vishnu, and those who survived concealed themselves in the bowels of the earth and the depths of the ocean of salt waters.

Once upon a time the ambrosia was robbed from the gods by Gar'uda, half giant and half eagle, the enemy of serpents. This "lord of birds" was hatched from an enormous egg five hundred years after it had been laid by Diti, mother of giants; his father was Kas'yapa, a Brahman identified with the Pole Star, who had sacrificed with desire for offspring. It happened that Diti, having lost a wager, was put under bondage by the demons, and could not be released until she caused the amrita to be taken from a Celestial mountain where it was surrounded by terrible flames, moved by violent winds, which leapt up to the sky. Assuming a golden body, bright as the sun, Garuda drank up many rivers and extinguished the fire. A fiercely revolving wheel, sharp-edged and brilliant, protected the amrita, but Garuda diminished his body and entered between the spokes. Two fire-spitting snakes had next to be overcome. Garuda blinded them with dust and cut them to pieces. Then, having broken the revolving wheel, that bright sky-ranger flew forth with the amrita which was contained in the moon goblet.

The gods went in pursuit of Garuda. Indra flung his thunderbolt, but the bird suffered no pain and dropped but a single feather. When he delivered the amrita to the demons his mother was released, but ere the demons could drink Indra snatched up the golden moon-goblet and wended back to the heavens. The demon snakes licked the grass where the goblet had been placed by Garuda, and their tongues were divided. From that day all the snakes have had divided tongues. . . . Garuda



became afterwards the vehicle of Vishnu; he has ever "mocked the wind with his fleetness".

Shiva, as we have indicated, developed from Rudra, the storm god. He is first mentioned as Mahadeva, "the great god", in the *Yajurveda*, and in the *Mahābhārata* he is sometimes exalted above Vishnu. In one part he is worshipped by Krishna. He is the "blue-necked, three-eyed trident-bearing lord of all creatures". The trident is a lightning symbol which appears to have developed from the three wriggling flashes held in the left hand of hammer-gods like Tarku and Rammon. Shiva's third eye was on his forehead, and from it issued on occasion a flame of fire which could consume an enemy; once he slew Kamadeva, the love god, who wounded him with flowery arrows, by causing the flame to spring forth.

Balor, the night god of Irish mythology, had similarly a destroying eye; "its gaze withered all who stood before it";<sup>1</sup> he was the god of lightning and death, the "eye-flame" being the thunderbolt.

Shiva's dwelling is on the Himalayan mount Kailāsa<sup>2</sup>. He is Girisha, "the lord of the hills", and Chandra-Shekarā, "the moon crested", Bhuteswara, "lord of goblins", and Sri Kanta, "beautiful throated". When he is depicted with five heads, he is regarded as the source of the five sacred rivers flowing from the mountains. As the god with snow-white face, he is the spirit of asceticism (Maha-Yogi) adored by Brahmans performing penances. In the *Mahābhārata* Arjuna, the warrior, invoked him by engaging in austerities until smoke issued from the earth. Then Shiva, "the illustrious Hara", appeared in huge and stalwart form and wrestled with him. Arjuna's limbs were bruised and he was deprived of his senses. When he recovered he hailed the god, saying: "Thou art



Shiva in the form of Vishnu and Vishnu in the form of Shiva . . . .<sup>1</sup> O Hari, O Rudra, I bow to thee. Thou hast a (red) eye on thy forehead. . . . Thou art the source of universal blessing, the cause of the cause of the Universe. . . . Thou art worshipped of all the worlds. I worship thee to obtain thy grace. . . . This combat in which I was engaged with thee (arose) from ignorance. . . . I seek thy protection. Pardon me all I have done."

Shiva, whose sign is the bull, embraced Arjuna and said, "I have pardoned thee."

The god was invoked by another warrior, Ashwattaman, son of Drona. Having naught else to sacrifice, the worshipper flung himself upon the altar fire; Shiva accepted him and entered his body so as to assist him in slaughtering his sleeping enemies. Bloody rites were at one time associated with Shiva worship. As the Destroyer of the Hindu Trinity, he is armed with a discus, a sword, a bow, and a club; but his most terrible weapon is the trident. Sometimes he is clad in the skin of an elephant and sometimes in that of a leopard, the tail dangling behind. A serpent, coiled on his head, rears itself to strike; another serpent darts from his right shoulder against an enemy.

The bull symbol, Nandi, the moon crescent on his forehead, and the serpent girdle, indicate that Shiva is a god of fertility. A phallic symbol is associated with his worship. In localities he is adored at the present day in the form of a great boulder painted red which usually stands below a tree. Offerings are made to this stone, and women visit it during the period of the moon's increase to pray for offspring.

As Natesa, the dancer, Shiva dances triumphantly on the body of a slain Asura. A fine bronze in the Madras

<sup>1</sup> Combined with Vishnu he is Hari-hara.



Museum depicts him with four arms, and a beaming, benevolent face, wearing a tiara, and surrounded by a halo of fire; he absorbed the attributes of Agni as well as those of Rudra. He is the destroyer of evil and disease, the giver of long life and the god of medicine, and is accordingly invoked to cure sickness. Victims of epilepsy are believed to be possessed by Shiva.

In early Puranic times, when Brahmanism was revived and reformed, the worship of goddesses came into prominence. This was one of the most pronounced features of the anti-Buddhist movement, and was due probably to the influence of Great Mother worshippers. In the Vedic Age, as we have seen, the goddesses were vague and shadowy; as wives of the gods they were strictly subordinate, reflecting, no doubt, the social customs which prevailed among the Aryans. Ushas, the dawn, and Ratri, the night, were mainly poetic conceptions. Even Prithivi, the Earth Mother, who was symbolized as a cow, played no prominent part in Vedic religion: a magical influence was exercised by water goddesses. The male origin of life appears to have been an accepted tenet of Vedic belief. Aditi, mother of the Adityas, is believed to be of more recent origin than her sons. Indra seems to have similarly had existence before his mother, like the other hammer gods, and especially P'an Ku and Ptah.

Female water spirits are invariably regarded as givers of boons, inspiration and wisdom; holy wells have from remote times been regarded as sources of luck; by performing ceremonial acts those who visit them obtain what they wish for in silence; their waters have, withal, curative properties, or they may be used for purposes of divination. The name of the goddess Saraswati signifies "waters"; she was originally the spirit of the Saraswati river, and was probably identical with Bharati, the goddess









of the Vedic Bharata tribe. In Puranic times she became the wife of Brahma and the Minerva of the Hindu Pantheon. She is identical with Vach, "Mother of the Vedas", the goddess of poetry and eloquence, and Viraj, the female form of Purusha, who divided himself to give origin to the gods and demons and all living creatures. When Brahma took for a second wife Gayatri, the milk-maid, she cursed him so that he could only be worshipped once a year.

Saranyu, who may have developed from Ushas, the Dawn, is the bride of Surya, the sun god, and mother of the twin Aswins; she fashioned the trident of Shiva and the discus of Vishnu, and other weapons besides.

Lakshmi, or Sri, who had her origin at the Churning of the Ocean, became the wife of Vishnu, and the goddess of beauty, love, and prosperity. She has had several human incarnations, and in each case was loved by the incarnation of Vishnu. She is Sita in the *Ramáyana*, and the beautiful herdsman beloved by Krishna. Lakshmi is "the world-mother, eternal, imperishable; as Vishnu is all-pervading, she is omnipresent. Vishnu is meaning, she is speech; Vishnu is righteousness, she is devotion; Sri is the earth, and Vishnu is the support of the earth." This benevolent goddess is usually depicted as a golden lady with four arms, seated on a lotus.

Shiva's complex character is reflected in the various forms assumed by his bride. As the Destroyer he is associated with Durga, who has great beauty and is also a war goddess. As Kali she is the black earth-mother, and as Jagadgaury, the yellow woman, the harvest bride. Armed with Celestial weapons, Durga is a renowned slayer of demons. In her Kali form she is of hideous aspect. Sculptors and painters have depicted her standing on the prostrate form of Shiva and grinning with outstretched



tongue. Her body is smeared with blood because she has waged a ferocious and successful war against the giants. Like Shiva, she has a flaming third eye on her forehead. Her body is naked save for a girdle of giants' hands suspended from her waist; round her neck she wears a long necklace of giants' skulls: like the Egyptian Isis, Kali can conceal herself in her long and abundant hair. She has four arms: in one she holds a weapon, and in another the dripping head of a giant; two empty hands are raised to bless her worshippers. Like the Egyptian Hathor or Sekhet, the "Eye of Ra", she goes forth to slay the enemies of the gods, rejoicing in slaughter. Like Hathor, too, she is asked to desist, but heeds not. Then Shiva approaches her and lies down among her victims. Kali dances over the battlefield and leaps on her husband's body. When she observes, however, what she has done, she ejects her tongue with shame.

As Sati, Shiva's wife is the ideal of a true and virtuous Hindu woman. When Sati's husband was slighted by her father, the Deva-rishi, Daksha, she cast herself on the sacrificial fire. Widows who died on the funeral pyres of their husbands were called Sati<sup>1</sup>, because in performing this rite they imitated the faithful goddess.

Sati was reborn as Uma, "Light", the impersonation of divine wisdom; as Amvika the same goddess was a sister of Rudra, or his female counterpart, Rudra taking the place of Purusha, the first man. Par'vati was another form of the many-sided goddess. Shiva taunted her for being black, and she went away for a time and engaged in austerities, with the result that she assumed a golden complexion.

A trinity of goddesses is formed by Saraswati, the white one, Lakshmi, the red one, and Par'vati, the black one. The three were originally one—a goddess who

<sup>1</sup> Often spelled *Suttee*.





GANESA (see page 151)

*From a sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum*





came into existence when Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva spoke of the dreaded Asura, Andhaka (Darkness) and looked one at another. The goddess was coloured white, red, and black, and divided herself, according to the Varaha Purana, into three forms representing the Past, Present, and Future.

It was after Sati burned herself that the sorrowing Shiva was wounded by Kamadeva, the love god, whom he slew by causing a flame of fire to dart from his third eye. This god is the son of Vishnu and Lakshmi. He is usually depicted as a comely youth like the Egyptian Khonsu; he shoots flowery arrows from his bow; his wife Rati symbolizes Spring, the cuckoo, the humming bee, and soft winds. As Manmatha he is the "mind-disturber"; as Mara, "the wounder"; as Madan, "he who makes one love-drunk"; and as Pradyumna he is the "all-conqueror".

Gane'sa<sup>1</sup>, the four-armed, elephant-headed god of wisdom, is the son of Shiva and Parvati. He is the general of Shiva's army, the patron of learning and the giver of good fortune. At the beginning of books he is invoked by poets, his image is placed on the ground when a new house is built, and he is honoured before a journey is begun or any business is undertaken. The elephant's head is an emblem of sagacity. A myth in one of the Puranas relates that the planet Saturn, being under a curse, decapitated Ganesa simply by looking at him. Vishnu mounted on the back of the man-eagle Garuda and came to the child's aid. He cut off the head of Indra's elephant and placed it on Ganesa's neck. In a conflict with a Deva-rishi Ganesa lost one of his tusks. Several myths have gathered round this popular, elephant-headed deity, who is also identified with the wise rat.

<sup>1</sup> A familiar Bengali rendering is "Gonesh", which is often given as a pet name to an exemplary boy.



Another son of Shiva and Parvati is Kartikeya, the Celestial general and slayer of demons. He is also regarded as the son of Agni and the Ganges.

The goddess of the Ganges is Gangá. This most sacred of all Indian rivers, the cleanser of sins and the giver of immortality, was originally confined to the Celestial regions, where it flowed from a toe of Vishnu. How it came to earth is related in the following myth: Sag'ara, a King of Ayodha (Oude), had great desire for offspring. He performed penance, with the result that one wife became the mother of a single son and the other of sixty thousand sons. He prepared to perform a horse sacrifice, but Indra stole the sacred animal. All the sons went in search of it by digging each for the depth of a league towards the centre of the earth. They were, however, consumed by the fire of Kapila, a form of Vishnu, who protected the earth goddess, his bride. Sagara was informed that his sons would come to life again and rise to heaven when the Ganges flowed down to the earth. His grandson went through rigid penances, and at length Brahma consented to grant the prayer that the sacred river should descend from the Himalayas. Shiva broke the fall of the waters by allowing them to flow through his hair, and they were divided into seven streams. When the waters reached the ashes of the slain princes, their spirits rose to heaven and secured eternal bliss. Sagra island, at the mouth of the Ganges, is invested with great sanctity, on account of its association with the King of Ayodha of this legend. All the Indian rivers are female, with the exception of the Sona and Brahmaputra, the spirits of which are male.

Other goddesses include Man'asa, sister of Vasuká, King of the Nagas, who gives protection against snake bites, and is invoked by the serpent worshippers: Sasti,





KARTIKEYA, THE WAR GOD

*From a painting by Surendra Nath Gangoly*

(By permission of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta)





the feline goddess of maternity and protectress of children, who rides on a cat; and Shitala, the Bengali goddess of smallpox, who is mounted on an ass, carries a bundle of reeds in her hand, and is clad in red; she is propitiated on behalf of victims of the dreaded disease.

A prominent part is played in the Brahmanic mythology of the Restoration period by the Deva-rishis, the deified Vedic poets, sages, and priests, who stand between the Vedic gods and the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Originally there were seven Deva-rishis, and these were identified with the seven stars of the Great Bear, their wives being represented by the Pleiades. Their number was, however, increased in time.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes they visit the earth in the form of swans, but more often they are brooding sages who curse gods and mortals on receiving the slightest provocation.

One of the most prominent of these Rishis is Na'rada<sup>2</sup>, who cursed and was cursed by Brahma. In the *Mahābhārata* he is a renowned teacher and a counsellor of kings, and also a messenger between Indra and heroes. He is a patron of music, and invented the Vina (lute) on which he loves to play. His great rival is Parvata, who also acts as a Celestial messenger.

Daksha is the father of Sati, the peerless wife of Shiva. It was on account of this rishi's quarrel with her husband, who was not invited to a great feast, that she flung herself upon the sacrificial fire. Shiva cut off Daksha's head and replaced it with the head of a goat.

Bhrigu was the patriarch of a Vedic priestly family. He married a daughter of Daksha, and was the father of

<sup>1</sup> In *Vishnu Purana* the Rishis are divided as follows: 1, Brahmarishis, sons of Brahma; 2, Devarishis, semi-divine saints; 3, Rajarishis, royal saints who had practised austerities. There are variants in other sacred books which refer to Maharishis, Paramarishis, &c.

<sup>2</sup> Or Narada.



Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu, who rose from the ocean of milk. Bhrigu once cursed Agni, whom he compelled to consume everything. Angiras, Kratu, and Pulaha were Deva-rishis who also married daughters of Daksha. Pulastya was a famous slayer of Rakshasas. He once cursed a king who refused to make way for him on a narrow forest path, and the king became a Rakshasa.

Marichi was the grandfather of the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu, and Atri was the father of the irascible sage Durvasas, a master curser.

Vasishtha is sometimes referred to as identical with Vyasa, the reputed arranger of the Vedas, and author of the *Mahābhārata*. He possessed a wonderful cow which granted whatever he wished for. A king named Vishwamitra desired to possess this wonderful animal, and when he found that he was unable to obtain it by force, he determined to raise himself from the Kshatriya to the Brahman caste by performing prolonged austerities. When Vishwamitra secured this elevation he fought with his rival.

Some Vedic scholars regard Vishwamitra and Vasishtha as actual historical personages. They argue that Vishwamitra was originally a Purohita (family priest) in the service of Sudas, the king of an Aryan tribe called the Tritsus. References are found in the *Rigveda* to the wars of Sudas, who once defeated a coalition of ten kings. Vishwamitra is believed to have been deposed by Sudas in favour of Vasishtha, and to have allied himself afterwards with the enemies of the Tritsus.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Oldenberg, the German Sanskrit scholar, is convinced, however, that there is no evidence in the *Rigveda* of the legendary rivalry between Vishwamitra and Vasishtha. He regards the Vasishthas as the family priests of the Bharata tribe and identical with the Tritsus.

<sup>1</sup> *Rigveda*, viii, 53. 9-11, and vii, 18.





PARVATI, WIFE OF SHIVA (see page 150)

*From a South Indian temple*





Among the tribes which opposed the advance of the conquering King Sudas, who appears to have been a late comer, was the Puru people on the banks of the Saraswati river. We find that the early authors suddenly cease to refer to them, and the problem is presented: What fate had befallen the Purus? Professor Oldenberg, whose view is accepted by Professor Macdonell, Oxford, explains that the Purus merged in the Kuru coalition. The Kurus gave their name to Kuru-kshetra, the famous battlefield of the epic *Mahábhárata*; they had already fused with the Panchala tribe and formed the Kuru-Panchala nation in Madhyadesa, the "Middle Country", the home of Brahmanic culture, the birthplace of the famous old *Upanishads*.

The Bharatas, and their priestly aristocracy of Tritsus, the Vasishthas, appear to have joined the Kuru-Panchala confederacy about the time that the *Brahmanas* were being composed, and these were probably influenced by the ritualistic practices of the Vasishthas. There are references to Agni of the Bharatas, and a goddess Bharati is mentioned in connection with the Saraswati river.

It appears highly probable that the Bharatas and the Kuru-Panchalas represent late invasions of peoples who displaced the earlier Aryan settlers in Hindustan. Among the enemies of the invaders were the Kasis, a tribe which became associated with Benares. It is not possible to prove the theory that this people had any connection with the Kassites who established a Dynasty at Babylon. The Kassites are believed to be identical with the Cossæi of later times, who were settled between Babylon and the Median highlands. Some think the Kassites came from Asia Minor after the Hittite raid on Babylon, if the Kassites, as Hittite allies, were not the actual raiders. The fact that the Maltese cross, which is found on



Elamite neolithic pottery, first appears on Babylonian seals during the Kassite Dynasty, suggests, however, that the Kassites came from the east and not the west, with the horse, called in Babylon "the ass of the east".

The great epic *Mahābhārata*, "the Iliad of India", may have been founded on the hero songs which celebrated the Aryan tribal wars in India. Its action is centred in Kuru-kshetra, "the country of the Kurus", in which the Bharatas had settled. Two rival families contend for supremacy; these are the Kauravas (the Kurus) and the Pandavas who are supported by the Panchalas and others. The Pandavas and Kauravas are cousins and the descendants of the eponymous King Bharata. In the royal family tree the tribal names of Kuru and Puru appear as names of kings.

A popular rendering is given in several chapters which follow of the epic narrative embedded in the *Mahābhārata*, which is about eight times as long as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined. This monumental work is divided into eighteen books; a supplementary nineteenth book alone exceeds in length the two famous Greek epics.

As we have stated, the *Mahābhārata* had its origin as an epic prior to B.C. 500. It was added to from time to time until it assumed its present great bulk. The kernel of the narrative, however, which appears to have dealt with the early wars between the Kurus and Panchalas, must be placed beyond B.C. 1000.

Our narrative begins with the romantic stories which gathered round the names of the legendary ancestors of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The sympathies of the Brahmanic compilers are with the latter, who are symbolized as "a vast tree formed of religion and virtue", while their opponents are "a great tree formed of passion".



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# THE SACRED BOOKS AND EARLY LITERATURE OF THE EAST

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## VOLUME IX

# INDIA AND BRAHMANISM

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*In Translations by*

CHARLES R. LANMAN, LL.D., Professor of Sanskrit, Harvard University, editor of Harvard Oriental Series; WM. D. WHITNEY, LL.D., former President of the American Philological Association and Professor of Sanskrit at Yale University; SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, K.C.I.E.; SIR M. MONIER-WILLIAMS, K.C.I.E., former Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University; ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT, C.I.E. of the Royal Asiatic Society; RALPH T. GRIFFITH, C.I.E., President of Benares College, India; MANMUTHA DUTT, of the Royal Asiatic Society.

*With a Brief Bibliography by*

PROF. CHARLES R. LANMAN, LL.D.

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*With an Historical Survey and Descriptions by*

PROF. CHARLES F. HORNE, PH.D.

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A word as to the pronunciation of Hindu names may help the reader. The consonants are very similar to ours, except for the "h" in combinations like "bh," "th," etc. This "h" is not pronounced as in "the," etc., but separately as in "post haste," "red hot," etc. Our own "sh" sound is indicated by an italic letter *S* or *s*. The italic *n* is used for the Sanskrit sound which more nearly approaches "ng" as we hear it in "singer," but not in "finger." The vowel "a" has the dull and almost indistinguishable sound of "u" in "fun," except when it is followed by "h" or is marked with an accent. Then it takes the sound of "a" in "far." The other vowels follow nearly the Italian system, "e" as in "prey," "i" as in "marine," "u" as in "rule." Thus, "Upanishad" is pronounced *oo-pun-ees-hud*, and "Sakuntalá" is *shŭ-koon-tŭ-lah*.



# SACRED BOOKS AND EARLY LITERATURE OF INDIA AND BRAHMANISM

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE RICHEST TREASURE OF THE EAST

**W**HEN, a century ago, the first translations of the ancient books of India reached Europe they aroused a most intense enthusiasm. Men declared that, of all the hidden treasure-hoards of the Orient, the one divinest treasure had been found. To quote only one of the many authoritative voices of that chorus of praise, Schopenhauer, the mighty founder of a new religion in the North, wrote that he considered the reading of the Sacred Books of Brahmanism "the greatest privilege which this still young century may claim before all previous centuries." He declared that the progress which must follow from this stimulus would equal that other tremendous progress, when Europe had been roused by the recovery of the thought of ancient Greece, and had achieved the Renaissance.

The reader of to-day is in far better position than were our ancestors of a century ago to estimate the real value of Indian literature. The number of its ancient books is vast indeed; but our learned men have read through all that they could find, and have analyzed them. The works which these scholars have declared the very best are here presented to the reader, with some brief guidance as to what their value is and whence they came.

When, less than two centuries ago, the British conquered India, they found it close-crowded with millions of people of

many races. Most numerous and powerful among these were the Hindus, who had dominated the land for three thousand years. There had been occasional foreign invasions and conquests — of Greeks under Alexander, of wild Scythian tribes, of fierce Mohammedan fanatics — but, on the whole, the Hindus had retained a permanent supremacy.

These Hindus were of Aryan stock — that same strong and highly intelligent people of remote antiquity from whom have sprung the Persians with their Zend-Avesta, the Greek and Roman world-conquerors, and every dominating nation of Europe and America to-day. The Hindus by their long association with the Eastern peoples had become markedly different from the Western Aryan races; yet in many ways they seem closer to our remote Aryan ancestors than do any other people of to-day.

For one thing, the Hindus' unchanging residence and unbroken supremacy of three thousand years had enabled them to retain a vast amount of ancient and almost purely Aryan writings, such as no other modern Aryan stock possesses. We have recovered recently some portion of the ancient Persian literature. We recovered, about five centuries ago, what was probably the best of ancient Greek. But the Hindu texts, older than the Greek, and perhaps even older than the oldest Persian, had never been lost, and had continuously taught and dominated the Hindu civilization.

When Britain conquered India this wonderful literature was not immediately revealed to us. It was hidden by the Brahman priesthood, as a sacred treasure. Only by very slow degrees did Western scholars get any word of it or any hint as to its value. Then, there came that epoch of tremendous enthusiasm, when Western readers declared that the climax of all wisdom was heaped up within the old Hindu books. With them, all spiritual meditation and philosophy were said to begin and end. This period of extravagant praise has passed, and we are ready now to look into this voluminous and ancient Aryan literature and form a calmer estimate of its worth.

Hindu thought is complex, intricate, almost childish at



one extreme and yet extraordinarily deep and subtle at the other. From it have developed two religions which reach far beyond India. Of the second of these — Buddhism — we shall treat in another volume. Our concern here is with Brahmanism, the earlier religion, the one which finds expression in all the more ancient books and in many modern works as well.

These earliest "Sacred Books" of the Hindus are called, collectively, the Vedas, meaning "books of holy knowledge," books of which not one word may be changed nor one word doubted. They are still so treasured by the brahmins,<sup>1</sup> or Hindu priests, that they are memorized from end to end, and thus handed down through the generations by the spoken word. The true brahmin repudiates and rather despises a book, as being an unworthy repository for his holy and once secret knowledge.

The number of the Vedic books is large; the period of their origin extended from about 1500 or perhaps 2000 B.C. down to 500 B.C. They are still chanted and written in the strange old Aryan tongue in which they were first composed, since each word is too sacred to be changed. This language, which we can not always fully understand, is called from them Vedic, or sometimes Old Sanskrit. From this there developed in the course of ages a somewhat different language, the usual Sanskrit, in which a whole new Hindu literature was written during the next thousand years. By that time Sanskrit also had faded out of common use, had changed by time and the infusion of new peoples into a quite different tongue, or rather into several tongues, the dialects used in India to-day.

#### THE ELDER VEDAS

It is these Vedic books, and then the equally interesting Sanskrit books which followed them, that we have now to

<sup>1</sup> The words "Brahma," "Brahman," and "brahmin" are often so loosely used, that the reader is cautioned that throughout this volume "Brāhma" denotes the god, "Brahman" is the adjective referring to him and his faith, "brahmin" is the priest, or the priestly caste of worshippers of Brāhma.

examine. Our search is for the earliest inspiration, the earliest aspirations of our Aryan race.

As a starting-point we look to the oldest of the Vedas. These are four collections of ancient songs, chiefly hymns. Some of the songs must certainly have been composed as early as 1500 B.C., and perhaps they date back to an even younger time, long before there was any written language to record them. They were used for religious ceremonies and therefore carefully handed down, as we have seen, from priest to priest, from honored master to eager scholar, through all the centuries.

Gradually the change of life and language compelled an addition to the sacred hymns, what we might call the second generation of Vedas, known as the Brâhmanas. These Brâhmanas were the brahmins' explanations and interpretations of the old songs, fitting them to the thought of a new day. Later still there grew up a third generation of Vedas, studies of philosophy called the Upanishads, and works of science known as the "forest treatises," because they were so profound that one could only master them by withdrawing to the seclusion of a hermit life of meditation among the forests.

In these Vedas of the third generation, and especially in the Upanishads, we find a depth of thought, a strength of clear-seeing intellect rivaling that of the most celebrated thinkers of Europe's Philosophic Age. Indeed, the scholars of India to-day have said rather contemptuously to our Western seekers that we waste time studying the earlier Vedas, that the Upanishads contain all the real wisdom of the past.

With this verdict the modern reader will scarcely agree. Intricate systems of abstract philosophy are apt to leave him cold; he doubts their practical value either in life or death. He will turn, perhaps with more human interest, to the human passions, hopes, and fears that flash upon him from the older Vedas.

The West has found its greatest interest, however, in viewing this long series of Vedas as a whole and in their relation to still later writings. Here we have a great national re-



ligion growing up, as it were, under our very eyes. We note, of course, a somewhat similar succession of holy books in Hebrew literature. The Bible is followed by the Talmud, with its older and its later commentary, each in turn accepted, as the Hindus accepted the successive Vedas, as an unchangeable legacy; and then comes the Gemara, a still later commentary and explanation, to be held in reverence in its turn by a later generation. Yet the two cases are sharply different. The faith of the Hebrews has scarcely changed; what the firm-visioned race believed in 600 B.C. and in the captivity at Babylon, they believe to-day. Brahmanism, on the other hand, has changed and changed and changed again, keeping ever in step with the changing civilization of its people.

That is to say, Brahmanism has changed outwardly. You will find many Hindu sages to-day to tell you it has never changed in essence, that all the present generation knows and believes lay implied in the oldest Veda. This idea of an implied, secret knowledge can, of course, only be a matter of faith. The old Vedas express nothing so profound. What they do say is sufficiently interesting in itself. It pictures for us the Aryan mind at a very early stage. Then, taking the later literature, we can see to what the mind and thought expanded, and into what it has since changed through an environment perhaps unfavorable.

#### THE RIG-VEDA

In this volume, therefore, the reader is shown, first, the earliest of the old hymn Vedas, called the Rig-Veda. He will find the singers here a simple, straightforward, valiant race, fighters and farmers, dwelling in the temperate mountain regions of northern India. Their chief gods are two. One is Indra, lord of the winds and clouds and storm, a stupendous, tempestuous, fighting hero like their own ideal of man. The second is Agni, lord of fire, but chiefly of the hearth-fire and its beneficent warmth, the sheltering god of home and the softer side of life. There are many other gods, most of them powers of nature such as the often-mentioned Maruts, or storm-spirits, surrounding Indra. And there is one remark-

able hymn, probably among the latest in date, which speaks of the one Supreme God who exists behind all these, unknown, omnipotent.

Gradually this idea of monotheism, of the one deity behind all outer powers and forces, mounts through the Song Vedas. The gods who were to dominate later Brahmanism are, however, scarcely known, even to the latest or Atharva Song Veda. Vishnu appears as a minor weather-god, the warmth and brightness of the sun. "Bráhmâ," in the older Rig, is merely a common noun meaning prayer or worship, and the brahmins are those who pray.

With the later priestly books of meditation, however, the Brâhmanas and Upanishads, the meaning of "bráhmâ" expands and expands to cover all religious thought and aspiration and wisdom, until at last the god Bráhmâ, with the same name as the old priestly caste, emerges clearly as the only God.

#### THE UPANISHADS

The most celebrated of these Upanishads are given here. They are the profound efforts of able, thinking men to explain the meaning of the universe. Their thought is based on monotheism, that is, they see this world as the creation of a single beneficent Being. They try also to see this Creator as all-powerful and all-perfect; and at once they meet the two perplexing riddles which have hampered every man-made rational religion. The one riddle is involved in the Creator's perfection. Creation implies change; but if the Creator is and always has been all-perfect, then the conditions surrounding him before the creation must have been all-perfect. On the other hand, the changing of these conditions implies discontent with them. Thus the mere desire to create implies preceding lack of perfection somewhere and denies the god's perfection. The second riddle is more obvious. How reconcile an all-powerful Creator with the existence of evil and suffering in this created world? Here, evil wars against good, that is against the god; unless we conceive him as an evil god, in which case good should perish. So here is the



all-powerful, with a foe forever resisting him; hence he is not all-powerful.

From these difficulties there developed in most Aryan faiths, whether Teutonic, Greek, Persian, or Hindu, the idea of dualism, of two gods — a creator and a destroyer — and of some mighty final battle in which men also should bear their part. The Hindu thinkers, however, soon looked far deeper than these ideas of battle, seeing further explanations and new problems which we must leave the Upanishads to express for themselves.

This development of philosophical Brahmanism brings us to the close of the Vedic period, perhaps to 500 B.C. By this time the Aryans had conquered India. They had become cosmopolitan. As rulers of a vast world of many mingled races, they had met many religions, each with its own varied gods. The conquerors had become so interwoven with the subject races that even their language had changed, and we must call them by their modern name of Hindus, rather than the parent term of Aryans. They had also evolved their system of castes; that is, the people were divided into four unchangeable classes: priests, warriors, merchants, laborers. They were ready for their first great post-Vedic book, which gives expression to their new ideas, the Laws of Manu.

This book shows us the Brahmanic faith in a state far more complex and complete than in the Upanishads. It is also, if we may use the term, more childish. That is to say, the book is addressed, not to thinkers, but to all the people; it is a work not of meditations, but of laws, finished and complete. It announces definitely to the mass of men what they should do upon all occasions, and what they should believe. It assumes that the priesthood possess all knowledge. It goes back to creation and narrates how that occurred; it refers to thousands of tales of thousands of gods, and endeavors to include them all.

Thus Brahmanism had become a fixed faith, scarcely capable of further growth. It had adopted three chief gods, though it was willing to welcome any number of lesser ones. First of the three great gods was Bráhmâ, who had created the

universe by merely thinking of its possibility; so that all that really exists is his vision, his dream of it all. The world, thus imagined, is continued by Siva, the god of birth and death, forever doing and undoing, creating and destroying. Third of the great trinity is Vishnu, the preserver, who, whenever the world becomes involved in irremediable trouble, steps in to save it, comes down to earth in some bodily form or incarnation to restore the rule of righteousness.

These incarnations of Vishnu proved of great service to the Brahmanic priesthood by enabling them to incorporate in their own religion that of any important subject people. If a great foreign god had done any great deed for mankind, he was one of Vishnu's incarnations and could be welcomed and worshiped as such. Thus a new literary development began — the work of weaving into the fixed framework of the Brahmanic faith all the legends and lore of India's many people.

#### THE TWO GREAT INDIAN EPICS

From these efforts arose the two great epics of India, the Mahabharata and the Râmâyana. These epics incorporate many scattered older tales, and weave them into two vast, loosely bound stories of two of Vishnu's incarnations. In the greater of these epics, the Mahabharata, he appears as the god Krishna who had absorbed the chief worship of Central India long before Brahmanism reached there, and who still retains his honor as a Vishnu incarnation. Indeed, he has become the chief voice through which the priesthood teach. There is in the Mahabharata one section in which Krishna expounds his doctrines; and this section, called the Bhagavad Gîta, reaches perhaps the highest spiritual elevation attained by Hindu faith. The Râmâyana similarly elevates to Vishnu rank another ancient, though probably more earthly hero, Râma.

The reader must not, however, suppose that these two epics are philosophical discussions. On the contrary, they are the ancient story-books of the people, told in good, vigorous story-form. They are filled to the brim with fighting and adventure, with love-making and gambling, family hopes and



sorrows; in short, a vast medley of everything humanly interesting, in which religion and philosophy hold only about the same relative space as they do in common Hindu life. These ancient epics are to-day the main source of the people's stories. The Vedic books are known only to the priests. The Laws of Manu are the foundations of all modern society in India, but folk grow into knowledge of them by custom, not read of them in books. The epics are the people's literature.

So far we have said little of the authors and chronology of all these ancient works. As to the authors, a priest within the vast Brahmanic priesthood had little individual existence and small use for fame. The names which have been attached to most of the ancient writings read like the guesswork of a later generation, and only a few slight legends touch at all upon the writers. As to the chronology, India has none. So little have her sages regarded the mere passage of years that they have kept no record, and sometimes we can not say even within a thousand years when a book was written or a great man lived! The most probable guess assigns the Mahabharata in its present form to about 500 B.C., and the Râmâyana to about A.D. 500, yet the Râmâyana may possibly be the older of the two. So also the greatest commentator on the Upanishads, the one whose interpretation of them has chiefly guided Hindu thought, is Sankara, who may have lived about 200 B.C., but whom recent scholars incline to set later by a full thousand years.

#### THE BEAST-FABLES

Another remarkable work, a valued legacy which is treasured by the whole human race, but upon which we can set no clear date, is the Panchatantra, or the Hitopadesa. These books, as we know them to-day, contain, the first in priestly form, and the second in popular style, the oldest beast-fables in the world. In their earliest form, whatever that may have been, they probably antedated Æsop's fables and were their source. These ancient tales were obviously composed under Brahmanic influence; but they deal not with religion, but with personal morality and worldly wisdom. Their

pithy couplets became the proverbs of the people; and the simpler form of this useful wisdom, the *Hitopadesa*, is known to every Hindu. Hence it, too, finds a place in our present volume.

#### LATER WRITERS

In an age more recent than that of any of these older books we come upon one, and the only one, distinct "literary period" of India. Even this date is much disputed, but it was probably about A.D. 500 that a powerful king, *Vikramaditya*, formed a distinctly literary court in which there were many writers. Most celebrated among them was *Kalidasa*, who to-day is often called the Indian Shakespeare, though his countrymen have found for him a fitter name, "the bridegroom of Poetry." His best known drama and some of his other poems are presented here. It was the appearance of this drama, *Sakuntalá*, in English, in the year 1789, that first roused the Western world to an excited interest in the literary greatness of India. So many poems have since been offered us as *Kalidasa's*, that our critics try to escape the puzzling flood by suggesting that there may have been three poets of that name.

To recapitulate, the best-known Brahmanic or Hindu books are those here offered to the reader. They are the oldest, or *Rig-Veda*, the later hymns of the *Atharva Veda*, the philosophic *Upanishads*, the two epics *Mahabharata* and *Râmâyana*, the beast-fables of the *Hitopadesa*, and the more modern works of the great poet *Kalidasa*. Through these the reader is invited to consider thoughtfully the development, for good or for evil, of Aryan thought and faith among the only Aryan folk who have not drawn their religion from an outside and Semitic source. The Hindus, though surrounded by foreign races, have built up for themselves an Aryan faith.



## THE RIG-VEDA

### (INTRODUCTION)

**T**HE name "Rig" means a song of praise, "Veda" means holy knowledge; so we have here a book of holy knowledge, made up of hymns. There are three other Hymn Vedas made up of similar songs, but they are of later date than the Rig, and their hymns are to some extent borrowed from it. Hence the Rig stands out as both the oldest and the most important. A Hindu tradition represents the Vedas as being as old as creation; and in accordance with this the reputed author of each hymn is not said to have composed it, but to have first "seen" it; that is, had it revealed to him. The Hindus have no records of ancient chronology whatever, yet even their modern scholars still gravely claim for the Rig-Veda an antiquity of from eight to twelve thousand years! European scholars smile at this. They can trace the Rig back to about 1200 B.C., and they are inclined to set its earliest possible beginnings at about 2000 B.C.

The Rig consists of over a thousand hymns, divided into ten Mandalas, or books. The first of these Mandalas is the longest and seemingly the oldest. Its hymns address only the very primitive gods: Indra, the god of the sky; Agni, the god of fire; and their immediate attendants, such as the sun-god, the wind-god, and those extremely interesting old heroes, the Maruts, or storm-gods. Professor Muller has made a special study of the Maruts as being perhaps the most primitive gods of all. In the hymns to them the growth and change of the religious spirit can be sharply traced. So our volume gives many of the Marut hymns. The earliest Aryan conception that there were outside powers to fear and to appease may well have been connected with the menace of the gathering thunder-storm.

But if the Maruts came first, in the primeval Aryan worship, then before the Rig was formed they had been already outranked by the broader conception of Indra, a general god of the weather, commanding the heavens in all their various moods toward man. Between Indra and the Maruts there is almost a clash of powers; and the doubt as to which should be addressed and placated shows often in the mind of the priestly singers. Indeed the favorite of the priests was neither of these warlike forces, but that other and more pacific deity, Agni. They have placed his hymns first in each of the ten Mandalas.

After the first and oldest Mandala, the Rig presents seven Mandalas containing the hymns preserved, and perhaps composed, by seven priestly families. Each of these books received the family name. The ninth Mandala contains only hymns to Soma. Soma was the intoxicating drink of the early Hindus, a milk-like, fermented liquor, which, because of its inspiring effect upon its devotees, seems to have been elevated to the full rank of a god. Not only did the Hindus use the beverage in their religious sacrifices, not only did they offer it to the gods, but they made it the subject of sacrifice and worship.

The tenth Mandala of the Rig seems, like the first, a collection from many sources. But it is a collection of later days. Long after the first nine books had become holy, there must have arisen new poems which seemed worthy to rank with them. Moreover, an effort may have been made to save such older songs as before had not been included in the holy books; and in rescuing these the priests were less particular than before as to the religious spirit of the poem. At any rate, there are in the tenth Mandala several poems which we would scarcely rank as hymns. They seem survivals of a looser verse. Yet the tenth Mandala contains also some of the most celebrated hymns of the entire Rig. Among these are the Creation Hymn, interesting in its resemblance to the Biblical account, and the hymn which we print last as perhaps the most impressive and profound of all, the Address to the Unknown God.



One other point of rather striking interest about these ancient poems is that several of them are attributed to woman authors. In this they are unique among the sacred books of the Farther East. Our Bible knows of the song of Miriam and of the prophetess Deborah; but no other Eastern literature presents the names or works of female writers of anything like a similar antiquity. Woman's position among these earliest Aryans seems to have been one of trust and honor. The following translations include two of these women's poems. The first of these may well hold our attention as being apparently the oldest piece of feminine literature that has survived the ages. Legend represents its opening stanzas as being actually composed by the princess Lopamudra, who wedded a brahmin sage and clung to him "like a shadow" through all his abstraction and self-mortification. As the poem appears in the first Mandala, we may roughly assign it to about the year 2000 B.C. Other poetesses of the Rig are the princess Visvavará, the goddess, or rather wife of a god, Idrani, and the mystic Vac, woman, goddess, or the personification of the power of words. Vac's noble hymn, which we give here, has been at least as much translated and discussed as even the Address to the Unknown God.

## THE ATHARVA VEDA AND BRÂHMANAS

### (INTRODUCTION)

**T**HE Atharva Veda is so called because it is believed to have been preserved for centuries by the priests of the Atharvan race, before it was united with the other Vedas. Like the three older Vedas, it is divided into three portions: its original songs, which are called the Atharva Veda Samhita; the earlier commentaries on these called Brâhmanas, and the later commentaries. These commentaries are not necessarily of more recent date than those of the Rig-Veda; but in the song portion the Atharva Veda is not only written in a less ancient tongue than the Rig, but it has also a markedly different religious spirit. The songs of the Rig were joyous and self-confident; those of the Atharva are possessed with fear. They are mainly charms, defenses against evil spirits or other malign influences: In short, they are the voices of man's weakness and anxiety, not of his strength and courage. It has been suggested that this change may well be due to the Aryans having by this time conquered so much of India that they had absorbed much of the life and race of the conquered peoples, and something of their weakness. At all events the reading of the Atharvan hymns or charms in this section of our volume will impress upon the reader the darker tone of their religion.

Our scholars therefore are not inclined to reckon this Atharva Veda as being of older date than about 1000 B.C. This period would roughly coincide with that of the earliest Brâhmanas, or commentaries on the Vedic Songs. Some of these Brâhmanas therefore are also illustrated in the present section. The Brâhmanas, as already pointed out, are the prose explanations of the early priests, by which they not only sought to clarify the ancient songs, but gradually built around



them another faith — or at least a version of the old faith very different from its earlier visible form.

These Brâhmanas are full of legends, some quaint, some beautiful. The story of the flood has in it strange echoes of both the Babylonian story with its picture of the gods seeking man's worship, and of the Hebrew version with its depiction of sin as being the cause of the destruction of the race. Perhaps the Brâhmanas are not highly intellectual, since they deal more with folk-lore than philosophy; but we shall find in them the philosophic tendency which was later to produce the celebrated Upanishads.

## THE UPANISHADS

### (INTRODUCTION)

**T**HE Upanishads are to-day the most studied and the most admired portion of the Vedas. Each one of the four ancient Hymn Vedas has its supplementary "Brâhmana," consisting of early priestly commentary; and each of these has its supplement of later priestly commentary. These final productions, the most advanced and developed thought of all the Vedas, the most daring searches of the unknown achieved by the Hindu mind, these are called the Upanishads.

The name means "a sitting down under a master," or perhaps an entering into secret mysteries. The Upanishads, as the name implies, were long the most treasured teaching passed from mouth to mouth among the Brahmanic priesthood. Their total number seems to have approached two hundred, but not all of them have been discovered by European scholars. Perhaps some of them were never written down and are still kept secret by jealous masters. Judging from the language of the known Upanishads, they are of widely varying age; and our Western scholars have thought they could trace in them, as in the Hymn Vedas, the change and growth of Hindu thought. Certainly the Upanishads which are the most primitive in thought are also most ancient in style. So we give the reader here what is perhaps the oldest of the better-known ones, the Aitareya, with its solemn, half-mystic speculation on the creation and the three births of man.

After this we present some still more noted Upanishads, first the Mundaka. The Mundaka has at least this claim to age that it is written, like the old Hymn Vedas, in verse, instead of employing the usual Upanishad form of prose.



Moreover, the Mundaka serves as a sort of link between the public sacrifices or acts of worship conducted by means of the Hymn Vedas and the private acts of meditation represented by other Upanishads. Indeed, the Mundaka seems once to have been chanted in a public service. If so, it is a strangely deliberate setting aside of the older faith. It begins with kindly appraisal of the worth of what men had worshiped before, and then firmly dismisses this to assert that there is a higher life and knowledge.

Following this we give two brief but very celebrated Upanishads, so well known among the Hindus that they are usually called not by their true names but by their opening words. These are the Talavakara Upanishad, called the Kena, and the Vagasaneyi Upanishad, called the Isa. The Kena is the argument for the existence of Bráhmâ or of a Supreme God, and so calls itself the Brahmi-Upanishad. The Isa is the shortest and perhaps the deepest, sternest, and to our warmer life the most unhuman, of all the Indian Sacred Books. It tells how only by ignoring life can we rise above it.

Next, our volume gives the Upanishad most widely known to Europe and most noted for its lofty style and grandeur of idea, the Katha Upanishad. It has the form of a narrative in which Yama, the god of death, is persuaded to tell what man may learn through death, though even Yama warns the eager listener that he knows not the innermost truths of being. These lie beyond even death's wisdom.

Throughout the Upanishads there is frequent reference to the sacred syllable "Om," or perhaps it will be more clearly understood if spelt "Aum," since it consists of three Sanskrit sounds and so symbolizes the Brahman trinity. The true meaning of "Om" refers in some way to the concentration of the mind; that is to say, to "meditate on Om" means to make the mind blank to all outer impressions of the senses, to become solely and wholly an embodied thought. This intense concentration is demanded by all the Upanishads as being the first step toward any real knowledge and advance in spirit. The almost equally frequent word "Hari," when

used as an exclamation, signifies, "Peace!" Hence the repeated formula of the brahmins, "Hari! Om!" might be translated as "Let us meditate deeply and in peace." Or when expressed, as it frequently is, as a prayer, it means, "God give us peace and the wisdom won by meditation." This is the idea that pervades all the Upanishads. Hari! Om!



## THE MAHABHARATA

### (INTRODUCTION)

**T**HIS name means "the Great History of the Bharatas," or people of India. As has been explained in the general introduction, this poem is the great epic narrative of India, the delight equally of her scholars and her people. Like everything in India it is vast in size, being over seven times as long as its Greek rivals, the Iliad and the Odyssey, combined. It is said to be the work of the poet Vyása; but *vyása* means "an arranger," and the poem is not only too enormous to be the work of one man, but it is also quite obviously a gathering and arranging of many poems from different ages. In its present form it probably dates from 400 or 500 B.C., and some of the older tales included within it must be several centuries older. The whole consists to-day of over two hundred thousand lines of sixteen syllables each. Of these about one-fourth keep to the central story; all the rest is made up of other stories, histories, or sermons. The most celebrated part of all is the Bhagavad Gîta, which is a didactic or philosophic poem, the highest and most widely accepted moral preachment in India, and which Sir Edwin Arnold has beautifully translated under the title of "The Song Celestial."

The central story of this truly stupendous epic tells of a great war, probably founded on some real war, between the rival descendants of the mighty king and ancient sage, Bhishma. His great grandsons, the Kauravas, are represented as ruling India. They number a hundred brothers, headed by the bold but evil Duryôdhana. They are pledged to share the realm with their cousins, the five sons of Pandu, called the Pandavas. But Duryôdhana keeps the sovereignty for himself, and wars against the five Pandavas, who are the heroes of the tale. The oldest of them is Yudhishtira, the

symbol of just and perfect manhood. The second is Bhima, a kindly, loyal-hearted giant of enormous physical strength. The third is Arjuna, the perfect warrior, master of every weapon, who from his chariot could fight sixty thousand foes at once. Then come the twins: Nakula, the most beautiful of manly men; and Sahadeva, the wisest and most steadfast. These five all, in accord with the primitive fashion of the time, wed the same wife, the glorious Princess Draupadī, who thereafter follows their fortunes. After many adventures they are victors in the great war against Duryôdhana and his followers, who are all slain. The five brothers, saddened by the loss of many friends, reorganize India in peace, and then go deliberately forth to seek Death, who has so long avoided them. This, their last journey, we give here as translated by Sir Edwin Arnold, and also their entry into heaven with the noble Yudhishtira's last triumph there.

Chiefly, however, we present that most celebrated of all Hindu poems, the Bhagavad Gîta. This is woven into the Mahabharata by the introduction of the god Krishna. It is quite obvious that Krishna came into the Hindu pantheon and also into the great epic at a comparatively late date. He is to-day the most popular god of India and the most complex, being the god of spring, of love and all its follies, yet also the god of truth and righteousness. In one form he is Ganesh, the elephant-god of slow and patient wisdom; in another he is Juggernaut, who crushes his worshipers to death. The brahmins explain him as one of the incarnations of Vishnu, the preserver of the world; and it is in this shape that he appears in the Mahabharata. He has become incarnate as a minor prince in the Pandavas' contest, so that right, as represented by the five heroes, may overthrow all-powerful wrong. It is by Prince Krishna's advice and assistance that the five are victorious at last.

The Bhagavad Gîta is the teaching of life which Krishna gives to Arjuna, the perfect warrior. Arjuna, on the eve of a mighty battle, visits Krishna, his friend and counselor, who in this episode is presented openly as a god. Arjuna is sad and deeply puzzled; he has no wish to slay those opposed



to him, yet he must uphold his brothers and the right. What is the right, anyway? What does life mean, and death, and toward what goal should man strive? Krishna answers him deeply and wonderfully in the highest flight of Hindu poetry. The resemblance of portions of the doctrine of the Bhagavad Gita to the doctrines of the Christian faith makes the question of the date of the Hindu poem one of extreme interest. Nothing positive, however, can be said on this point. This is certainly one of the last additions to the Mahabharata, and perhaps the weight of evidence might lead us to set it as late as the year 200 after Christ, yet it may well be of far earlier date.





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